Other Cinemas, Other Criticisms

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MARGINAL CINEMAS AND MAINSTREAM CRITICAL THEORY

JULIANNE BURTON EXAMINES THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THIRD WORLD CINEMA AND 'FIRST WORLD' CRITICISM

The Hour of the Furnaces, directed by the originators of the term 'Third Cinema'.

BEGINNING in the mid-1950s – and continuing up to the present day – individuals and groups throughout the Third World have embraced the film medium as an essential tool for forging a sense of national identity and cultural autonomy. Works produced over this thirty-year span have commanded considerable recognition in the metropolitan countries. During this same period, there has been an unprecedented elaboration of film theory and critical methodology in the developed sector. Despite ideological and programmatic affinities which derive from the essentially oppositional nature of both spheres of activity, from their embattled challenge to dominant modes of making and looking at films, these two spheres of activity have remained – until

now – remarkably separate. My purpose here is to inquire why this has been the case and to consider some recent works which attempt either to ratify or to bridge this cultural-critical divide.

If the concept of *la politique des auteurs* as articulated in *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the mid-'50s can be construed (however heuristically) as marking the inception of the development of modern film theory, it is instructive to contrast its evolution in the dominant and dependent sectors. Andrew Sarris' (mis)translation of the term as 'auteur theory' underlines the nature of its application in the English-speaking world in general and to Hollywood production in particular. In these applications the term was used as the conceptual foundation of a critical perspective which hypostatised the determining role of a single individual (the director or 'author') in the shaping of a film. In Latin America (as in other regions of the Third World), *la política de los autores* was more directly translated and translatable as a practical-strategical position (simultaneously a 'policy' and a 'politics') from which to combat the actual or putative norm of a hierarchical studio-based production system in which the director was relegated to subordinate managerial status. The articulation of a *politique des auteurs* offered a theoretical and practical justification – and, in the careers of the French New Wave directors, a living precedent – for the directors' declaration of independence from the tyranny of the producers. The self-proclaimed reinfranchisement of Third World independents as the ultimate artistic and ideological authority for their films was a fundamental step in both the appropriation of the film medium to non-commercial ends and in the consequent transformation of modes of filmic production in Latin America specifically, and in the Third World in general. The application of this concept in the Third World context retained the 'plurality' of the original term in that it was used to foster the collaborative purposes of more or less unified groups of creative artists working toward similar political goals. (Brazil's Cinema Novo and the Cuban Film Institute are the outstanding examples here.[1])

This example is symptomatic of a more generalised disparity. In the more disadvantaged and consequently more embattled and politicised arenas of the Third World, emphasis falls on the practical application of theoretical concepts, while the relative shelter and security of the developed world encourages theoretical elaboration without any mandate for practical application outside the realm of the theorists and critics. The same theoretical construct that evolved into a critical methodology for examining existing films in the developed sector formed the basis, in regions of the Third World, for a programmatic practice which simultaneously produced new categories of films and transformed the structures and relations of film production and dissemination.

Concrete conditions in the Third World have not supported the division of labour which has occured in the developed sector between action (in this case, film-making) and reflection (in this case, theory and criticism). Emphasis falls on practical theory, refusing the idea that the elaboration of theory can itself constitute a kind of praxis. As Fernando Birri, pioneer of the New Latin American Cinema movement, expresses

[1] The majority of my examples will derive from Latin America, the site of the most sustained and concerted oppositional cinematic practice in the Third World and the principal area of my own expertise.

[2] From my interview, published as 'Fernando Birri: Pioniere e Pellegrino' in Lino Micciche (ed), *Fernando Birri e las Escuela Documental de Santa Fe*, Pesaro, Italy, XVII Mostra Internazionale del Nuovo Cinema, June 1981, p 10, and forthcoming in my *Focusing on Latin America: Conversations with Filmmakers* (University of Texas).

[3] All four essays are included in Michael Chanan (ed), *Twenty-five Years of the New Latin American Cinema*, London, BFI and Channel Four, 1983. Authors and dates are, in order: Glauber Rocha, 1965; Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, 1969; Julio García Espinosa, 1970; Jorge Sanjines, 1976.

[4] In Michael Chanan, op cit, p 32.

[5] Written by Miguel Littin. The English version appears in Michael Chanan (ed), *Chilean Cinema*, London, BFI, 1976, pp 83-84.

it, 'Theory and practice must go hand-in-hand, [but] practice must be the key, with theory as its guide and interpreter.'[2] The major theoretical essays to emerge from the Latin American film movement – 'The Aesthetics of Hunger', 'Towards a Third Cinema', 'For an Imperfect Cinema', 'Problems of Form and Content in Revolutionary Cinema'[3] – have all been written by film-makers whose theoretical propositions derive from the concrete practice of attempting to make specific films under specific historical conditions. This fact has been the source of both their strengths and their weaknesses. Film criticism in the region suffers from a similar imbalance in that the vast majority of Latin American film journals have been founded and edited by people who are also directly involved in producing and promoting independent national cinema. In practice, the most significant exchanges of ideas tend to take place in festivals and other public forums while the magazines are reserved for primarily informational and promotional purposes rather than serving as site of sustained critical theoretical dialogue.

In Latin America, as elsewhere in the developed and underdeveloped world, film-makers have often dismissed the operations performed by the critic as intrusive, arbitrary, superfluous. In what is regarded as the foremost manifesto of the New Latin American cinema, Cuban Julio García Espinosa declared quite categorically that, 'Imperfect cinema rejects whatever services criticism has to offer and considers the function of mediators and intermediaries anachronistic.'[4] The echoes of this rejection reverberated widely. In the Manifesto of Popular Unity Filmmakers (Chile, 1971), for example, article nine reads: 'We maintain that a cinema based upon our objectives necessarily implies a different kind of critical evaluation; and we affirm that the greatest critic of a revolutionary film is the people to whom it is directed, who have no need for mediators to defend and interpret for them.'[5]

This defensive attitude is no doubt partially responsible for the ongoing 'development of critical underdevelopment' in many Third World film sectors. The dearth of critical approaches specific to the film medium and cognisant of worldwide trends is pervasive in Latin America and in other regions of the Third World. In large degree this dissociation between marginal cinematic practices and 'mainstream' critical theory is another instance of the asymmetrical nature of cultural exchange between the developed and underdeveloped spheres, since the metropolitan sector imports and consumes the 'raw materials' produced in the Third World (films, in this case) more easily than peripheral sectors can import and consume the 'manufactured products' of the developed sector (in this case, theoretical and critical writings). Since specialists in film history, theory and criticism have only recently begun to be produced in significant numbers by metropolitan universities, it is not surprising that Third World societies have not yet found a means of supplying themselves with such a 'luxury product'. Translation is another specialised and expensive skill which has been rendered 'superfluous' by the crisis in the Latin American publishing industry – the combined product of repressive political conditions and a regional economic crisis which has severely curbed publishing activity

throughout the hemisphere. These conditions have meant that the chronic cultural lag between 'First World' cultural production and Third World cultural reception has become in this case a cultural gap.

Third World film study outside the Third World bears the mark of a double marginality—one inevitable, one voluntary. As products of Third World countries, the films which are the object of its inquiry are by definition marginal rather than mainstream outside their national context, whatever their status within it. This first level of marginality can be a source of influence to the degree that films from the Third World expose or subvert the more mystifying and alienating operations of dominant cinema or declare their autonomy from them by returning to pre-colonial modes of signification. In their explicit and implicit contestation of mainstream culture in the developed world, marginal cultural products may, under certain conditions, exert an impact disproportional to their marginality despite the efforts of the culture industry in the dominant sector to preclude this.

But in order to exert such an impact outside their domestic sphere, Third World films have to rely on a mediating agency—an advocate in the guise of a film critic, historian, scholar or other certified 'expert' with media access. To the degree that they wish their films viewed outside their own immediate geographical-cultural context, Third World filmmakers must enlist the services of those they have dismissed as superfluous.[6] Though the object of these critics' concern—oppositional film production in the Third World—is marginal by definition, the nature of their critical approach is only marginal by choice. Why have advocates of Third World film from the developed sector been so remiss in exploring the potential applications of mainstream critical theory to the oppositional cinemas of the Third World? And why have they (we) failed to make a compelling case for Third World film practice as a transformative prism through which the limitations of mainstream critical theory can be displayed and transformed?

Promotion and defence of Third World film practice in the dominant sector has generally been undertaken in terms of traditionally hegemonic critical discourse (liberal humanism) rather than in terms of what were initially more marginal, oppositional critical discourses (film-as-ideology and cine-semiotics). Critics of Third World cinema who operate in a First World context have been motivated by the contradictory impulse to win recognition for their object of study within the very institutions which also serve to endorse and perpetuate dominant, colonising, hierarchical cinematic discourses. Given the cross-cultural nature of such an enterprise, there has also been a predictable tendency for the articulation of the culturally specific to take precedence over the articulation of the cinematically specific, to the degree that these can be construed as separate.

The question of ideological identifications and allegiances also figures prominently here. A sense of solidarity with movements promoting greater political and cultural autonomy in the Third World has restrained many critics from undertaking a rigorous examination of the ideological contradictions lodged in the films and movements for which

[6] This need is a function of commercial and/or cross-cultural ambitions. Super-8 and video-makers who direct themselves to restricted, homogeneous audiences and harbour no ambitions outside this intended radius, are arguably exempt.

they seek recognition. Maintenance of the illusion of ideological consistency within and among the products of oppositional film movements in the Third World – what might be called the myth of the monolith – has blocked the enlistment of some of the most viable methodological and critical propositions generated in the developed sector.

This article grows out of the recognition that the present moment is one of transition. In both the film movements of the Third World and the theoretical-critical articulations of the developed sector, one senses a pause, a plateau, which provides an opportunity to take stock of past and future directions. This 'slowing down' is both the product and the portent of a 'broadening out', a pluralism of practical and theoretical discourses.[7] Critical theory faces the challenge of testing its claims to generality if not universality of application against instances of historical and cultural specificity. There is a clear and pressing mandate, articulated most insistently and constructively to date by Western European and North American feminists, to isolate and articulate modes and effects of differentiation in the production and reception of meaning through cinema. To date, independent and avant-garde practices have provided the instances of otherness against which existing theories and methodologies are to be tested. In both these cases, the degree of otherness is relativised by the fact of co-existing in the same sphere as the dominant practices both are seeking to contest or displace. Third World film practices provide another locus of cultural and historical specificity, a 'new frontier' which, while extraordinarily promising in its extension, scope and variety, is also potentially intimidating in its resistance to assimilation.

II.

Teshome Gabriel's *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation*[8] is the first book to undertake a comprehensive analysis of Third World cinema as a tricontinental phenomenon. The study's most obvious virtue is also its principal weakness. In order to consider Third World cinema as a unified historical and political phenomenon, Gabriel feels compelled to posit the Third World over the past 30 years as the site of a unitary, autonomous, ideologically transparent cultural practice. The distortions required to perpetuate this 'mythical' vision of an internally consistent cultural practice across oceans and decades and vastly disparate cultural heritages and social formations are multiple, beginning with the very term 'Third Cinema', an appellation widely questioned by many Third World film-makers and flatly rejected by others, whose problematic genesis and history Gabriel declines to discuss.

The term 'Third Cinema' was in fact coined by Argentine documentarists Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino to designate a kind of film-making which opposes both dominant-industrial ('first') and independent-auteurist ('second') cinema. Since this essay did not appear until 1969 and did not receive wide circulation until the early '70s, 'Third

[7] See Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction,* University of Minnesota, 1983, pp 201-202; and Bill Nichols (ed), introduction to Volume 2 of *Movies and Methods* (forthcoming, 1985).

[8] Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1982. Further citations are in the text.

Cinema' could not and did not designate the emerging film movements of the Third World from their inception. The term has an historical link to General Juan Peron's 'third option' for Argentine politics, a form of non-aligned developmentalism.[9] (Solanas and Getino were closely associated with Peron, both during his exile and after his return to Argentina.) The political connection to Peronism moved a large number of Latin American film-makers to reject the term 'Third Cinema' in favour of other designations. The term has not enjoyed broad currency in other regions of the Third World, though some Western critics have adopted it.[10]

Throughout his 97-page text, Gabriel seems to be groping for a conclusive definition of 'Third Cinema'. In some instances, he cultivates specificity at the expense of broad applicability: e.g., Third Cinema is 'moved by a concern for the fate of Third World man and woman threatened by colonial and neo-colonial wars' (p 1). In others, he offers generality at its most diluted, e.g., 'Inherent in this cinema ... are the social life, ideologies and conflicts of the times' (p 1) and Third Cinema 'corresponds to the cultural tasks and political needs of the society it represents' (p 2). Gabriel claims that Third Cinema is developing a 'new language' (p 2). The critical demonstration of the particular codes and component structures of this language would provide a much more effective point of entry into the fundamental problem of definition. Gabriel's inability to articulate these compels him to fall back on attempted 'definitions' which are inductive and, as such, inevitably partial and frequently conflicting.

Third Cinema, for Gabriel,

represents a significant alteration in the parameters of film form and in the critical and theoretical categories necessary for an explanation of its significance and effect. The aesthetics and ideology of Third Cinema poses a radical and singular challenge to existing or traditional categories of film scholarship, even to the universalistic claims of contemporary film semiotics (p 5).

But rather than indicate how theoretical and critical categories bear redefinition in light of Third World cinematic practice, Gabriel tends instead to suggest the superfluousness of critical theory by positing the ideological transparency of the Third World film (to the properly sensitised viewer):

Cine-structuralism strives to find immanent meaning in works whose deeper meaning is concealed. The films under discussion in this study do not try to hide their true meaning. The burden of search, therefore, will be across a different terrain p 5).

Yet, he acknowledges, 'more than an aesthetic of transparent reflection is needed.... Represented reality is not simply a direct translation of empirical relations but its filtering reconstruction' (p 6). Repeatedly, he explicitly calls for 'a method whereby the films can be viewed in an

[9] For more on this 'non-aligned developmentalism', see Juan Corradi cited in Ronald Chilcote and Joel Edelstein (eds), *Latin America: The Struggle with Dependency and Beyond*, Cambirdge, Mass, Schenkman, 1974, p 375.

[10] See Zuzana Pick (ed), *Latin American Filmmakers and the Third Cinema*, Ottawa, Carleton, 1978; and Guy Hennebelle, 'L'Influence du "Troisième Cinéma" dans le Monde...', *Revue Tiers Monde*, vol xx no 79, July-September 1979, pp 615-645.

11 See my review in *Cineaste* vol 9 no 3, Spring 1979, pp 50-53.

12 See my essay, 'Seeing, Being, Being Seen: Portrait of Teresa or the Contradictions of Sexual Politics in Contemporary Cuba,' *Social Text*, no 4, Fall 1981, pp 79-95.

13 See Anna Marie Taylor, 'Lucia', *Film Quarterly*, vol XXVIII no 3, Winter-Spring 1975, pp 53-59.

14 This patriarchal substratum goes unnoticed in Julia Lesage, 'One Way or Another: Dialectical, Revolutionary, Feminist', *Jump/Cut: A Review of Contemporary Cinema*, no 20, May 1979, pp 20-23; as well as in Annette Kuhn, *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982, pp 162-166; and E Ann Kaplan, 'The Woman Director in the Third World: Sara Gomez' 'One Way or Another', *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*, New York, Methuen, 1983, pp 189-194.

15 See Robert Stam, 'The Hour of the Furnaces and the Two Avant-Gardes', *Millenium Film Journal* no 7/8/9, Fall/Winter 1980-81, pp 151-164; and Mark Falcoff, 'Original Sin and Argentine Reality: Peronist History and Myth in The Traitors', *Proceedings of the Pacific Coast*

evolving aesthetic and social context', and maintains that 'any theory and criticism within the context of Third Cinema cannot be separated from the practical *uses* of film' (p 6). In practice, however, Gabriel ends up subsuming aesthetics, hermeneutics and the psychodynamics of textual reception under the rubric of ideology, which he construes as specific, autonomous, non-deceptive and non-illusory, exerting a material force in that it is governed by its own system of representation (pp 8-12). Gabriel's idea of ideological analysis hinges on the assumption of equivalence rather than disparity, contradiction, or incompleteness. Since only bourgeois or colonised film-making endeavours to conceal the processes by which it produces meaning, the role of the interpreter of Third World film is simply 'to place Third Cinema in its proper socio-aesthetic context and to appraise its achievements in terms of its own cultural/ideological outlook' (p 2).

Conjunctural specificity is indeed one of the defining characteristics of oppositional art. Because of their hegemonic status, dominant cultural products (and the institutions through which they circulate) tend to assume the universality of their appeal. Oppositional art must recognise itself as a product of particular historical/political/cultural circumstances. Yet no matter how particularised, no matter how tendentious, no work of art – film, novel or other cultural product – can sustain the kind of privileged claim to transparency and unity of meaning which Gabriel attempts to make for Third World cinema (even in the eyes of those viewers who are properly versed in Third World culture). Meaning in any communicative medium is never direct and complete; it is instead oblique, selective, mediated. The fact that a work of art may overtly acknowledge an ideological dimension does not exempt it from examination in search of inadvertent or unacknowledged ideological operations. Invisible, unconscious, uncontrollable factors intervene both at the point of production and at the point of reception.

Gabriel's assumption of such ideological unity and transparency is challenged by concrete examples of ideological suppressions and contradictions in countless Third World film texts. The four-part Bolivian feature *Chuquiago* (1977) attempts to examine class differences while suppressing the fact of history, but the absence of an historical perspective distorts the class analysis.[11] The Cuban feature *Portrait of Teresa* (1979) undercuts the presentation of its heroine in ways which call into question the film's explicit claims to support women's equality.[12] Feminists have criticised *Lucia* (Cuba, 1968) for using women as historical symbols rather than genuine agents of history[13], but the deep patriarchal bias of a subsequent Cuban film, Sara Gomez' *One Way or Another* (1974/1977) has escaped the attention of a number of feminist critics whose enthusiastic assessments have established this particular film as a kind of paradigm of feminist signifying practice in a Third World context[14]. Films like *The Hour of the Furnaces* (1968) and *The Traitors* (1973), both made in Argentina prior to Juan Peron's return to power, elicit a significantly different reading from the historical vantage point of the subsequent decade.[15]

Gabriel refers to all these films as examples of the unity of Third
World texts. His commitment to presenting Third Cinema as a unified
and unitary signifying practice thus leads him to ignore or suppress
contradictions within the texts themselves and within and between the
film movements which produce these texts. It also leads him to posit a
kind of barrier of cultural impermeability between dominant and depen-
dent cultures which does not exist. This container theory of culture
conceives of a finite substance which can be spent and therefore requires
that the remainder be 'conserved': 'Since the Third World should not
continue to dissipate its culture and national identity, Third Cinema
attempts to check this and conserve what is left' (p xi). This notion leads
Gabriel to posit pristine cultural integrity and autonomy as one of the

criteria for distinguishing the genuine article: 'Films made in the Third World that show dependency on an external or alien culture cannot... be characterized as Third Cinema' (p 2). Yet it can be persuasively argued that the very adoption of the film medium in a Third World context inevitably imports and/or perpetuates relations of technological dependency and risks introducing and/or perpetuating mechanisms of cultural dependency as well. The desire to return to a state of pre-colonial innocence and integrity, to strip off alien layers until the pure essence of national culture reveals itself, is a pervasive but illusory goal of proponents of 'cultural decolonisation' throughout the under-developed world. In a paper which meditates on the cultural impact of the Nicaraguan revolution, Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano posits an alternative to this view as it has been espoused in one particular Third World context:

National culture is defined by its content, not by the origin of its elements. Alive, it changes incessantly, it challenges itself, it contradicts itself, and it receives external influences that at times increase it, and that are wont to operate simultaneously as a threat and a stimulus. It would be a delusion and an act of reactionary stupidity to propose the rejection of European and North American cultural contributions already incorporated into our heritage and into the universal heritage, arbitrarily reducing those vast and complex cultures to the machinery of imperialist alienation implicit in them. Anti-imperialism also is prey to infantile disorders. The lack of what is denied to us need not imply the refusal of what nurtures us. Latin America need not renounce the creative fruits of cultures which have flowered in great measure thanks to a material splendor not unconnected to the pitiless exploit-ation of our people and our lands.[16]

III.

The very proliferation of names which have been used to designate Third World film-making – new cinema, alternative cinema, revolution-ary cinema, imperfect cinema, anti-imperialist cinema, among others – testifies to a certain elusive indefiniteness in the object itself. Definitions of the nature of this activity, as Gabriel's *Third Cinema in the Third World* indicates, are no less multiple and indeterminate and no less problematic. I have adopted the terms marginal and oppositional because they are capable of designating the vast proportion of Third World film practice without being geographically confined to that area. Marginal and oppositional forms can and do exist in the developed world as well, and this fact, far from constituting a limitation, has the virtue of enhancing the viability of the terminology. Third World cinema has not been satisfactorily named or defined up until now because those who have made the attempt have regarded it as a geographically and ideo-logically circumscribed activity. It must be recognised that the film products and practices of the underdeveloped world cannot be under-stood in isolation from those of the developed world. One of the major

[16] Eduardo Galeano, 'The Revolution as Revelation', translated by Walter I Bradbury, *Socialist Review* no 65, September-October, 1982, p14.

strengths of Third World film criticism (and Third World cultural criticism in general) has been its insistence upon the impossibility of severing any specific cultural product from its socio-historical, geo-cultural context. One of the major weaknesses of Third World criticism has been its inability to recognise the impossibility of severing the oppositional (and collaborationist) cultural practices and ideologies of the dependent world from the dominant (and contestational) cultural practices and ideologies of the developed world.

Dominant and oppositional, marginal and mainstream cultures are not independent but interdependent phenomena. Antithetical to one another, that very adversarial quality locks them together in the hostile embrace of embattled wrestlers. Mainstream cultural manifestations appropriate marginal creativity without acknowledging (and often actively concealing) the source. Oppositional cultural practice defines itself as a denial of and an alternative to dominant practice, a stance which requires constant monitoring of its adversary. Dominant or mainstream cultures thus establish the terms of oppositional or marginal cultures to a significant degree. In this sense, oppositional culture is necessarily reactive. Culture can be marginal without being oppositional, but cannot be mainstream without being in some degree dominant. The terminology is relational, requiring the articulation of both poles of the antithesis. It also allows for varying degrees of dominance and oppositionality. Most importantly, the terms presuppose a global focus, a 'world systems' approach.

To point to the Third World as the site of a unitary and autonomous oppositional cinematic practice is to promote a deception for the reasons I have outlined above, and for another reason as well. In a very fundamental sense, 'Third World' is a signifier without a signified, a term without a referent. The debate over which countries are and are not to be included spans the life of the term itself. Even those who question its validity continue to use it for want of a more satisfactory term to designate those portions of the world characterised by economic underdevelopment which is the lingering heritage of colonial subjugation and exploitation. Given the patent arbitrariness and contradictions of the attempt to construe some three quarters of the surface of the globe as a unified geo-political entity, there is no reason to expect the cultural production of this heterogeneous amalgam of nations to be less blessed or cursed by difference and exception.

Transitional and intraconflictual cultural formations are just as typical of Third World societies as transitional social formations. The Third World must be analytically approached 'as a social formation which is dominated by an articulation of two modes of production – a capitalist and a non-capitalist mode – in which the former is, or is becoming increasingly, dominant over the other.'[17] The resulting 'restricted and uneven' forms of development characteristic of Third World political economies presuppose two or more modes of production whose very interdependence is a function of their eventual incompatibility. Until this interdependence of 'incompatible' elements is recognised as

[17] John G Taylor, *From Modernization to Modes of Production: A Critique of the Sociologies of Development and Underdevelopment*, Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, Humanities Press, 1979, pp 101-103.

inherent to both the cultural products of the dependent sector and the process of their production, with the full acknowledgement of the creative as well as the restrictive consequences of this dynamic tension, we cannot hope to understand the cultural products and practices of the Third World.

Any viable accounting of Third World film practices must therefore posit a relationship to dominant cinema which is continuous and contingent even in its will to discontinuity and differentiation. This interrelationship is present on several levels which range across language, technology and the entire cinematic apparatus.

Attempts at transforming the legacies of cultural domination are not confinable to the categories of form or content or even to the articulation of the interactive relationship between the two. A third term is essential: context, the social/historical/cultural/political/economic milieux out of which any particular film is generated and into which it is received. More than their determination to give expression to new forms and new contents, the most significant aspect of oppositional film movements in the Third World has been their fundamental commitment to transforming existing modes of film production, diffusion and reception. These transformative strategies range from the apparently atavistic recourse to artisanal modes, to the anticipation of more socialised industrial ones. Where the dominant cinema prioritised exchange value, oppositional film-makers have emphasised use values. Where dominant procedures turned film-makers into virtual piece workers, oppositional procedures sought a reintegration of creative personnel at all levels of the process. Where dominant practices required large amounts of capital and infrastructure, oppositional film-makers sought to strip the process down to its barest essentials – a camera in hand and an idea in mind, in Glauber Rocha's oft-quoted phrase. Where the structures and conventions of traditional cinema required an anonymous, passive and socially fragmented audience who did their viewing in the impersonal and ritualised space of the conventional movie theatre, oppositional film-makers sought physical spaces and organisational formats which emphasised communality in order to encourage audience participation and feedback. The common thread linking all these efforts is the will to 'de-alienate' alienated and alienating social relations, based on a dual recognition: that social change has its deepest roots in self-realisation, and that the creative process provides a quasi-utopian space in which more ideal social relations may develop.

Oppositional film-making in the Third World is therefore best described not as a 'new language' but as a new practice or set of practices in constant evolution in response to the evolution of dominant practices. Whether or not they acknowledge the inevitable symbiosis produced by these relations of (inter)dependency, Third World film-makers have only three basic textual strategies open to them. These strategies constitute a dynamic and flexible typology of Third World film.

On the formal level, in the present as in the past, dominant cinematic practices promote the phenomenon of cinema-as-spectacle. Third World

film-makers can mimic that spectacle, attempt to substitute a non-spectacular cinematics in its place, or aggressively subvert the cinema-as-spectacle phenomenon. In the first case, they can only make a claim to oppositional status based upon their attempt to infuse indigenous content into borrowed forms, adapting the cinema-spectacle to their own national/ideological ends. (*The Traitors*, a political thriller made clandestinely in Argentina in 1973, is a notable example of this mimetic strategy, as is *Bye Bye Brazil* (1980), a road movie *a la brasileira*.) Alternatively, Third World film-makers can attempt to supplant the spectacle with the non- (or pre-) spectacular by substituting some indigenous/autonomous discourse whose 'otherness' is almost inevitably one of degree rather than kind. (The Brazilian feature *How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman* (1971), an 'anthropological reconstruction' which scrupulously and humorously turns the normative assumptions of Western civilisation on their heads, is an intriguing example of this substitution strategy. Ousmane Sembène's *Emitai* (Senegal, 1971), discussed in detail by Gabriel (pp 25-27) would be another.) After *Blood of the Condor*, criticised by its own director as being compromised by its conventional narrative structures and mimetic language, Bolivian Jorge Sanjines has dedicated himself to filming historical reconstructions of actual events in collaboration with peasants and miners in various Andean countries, a practice which fits within this second category.
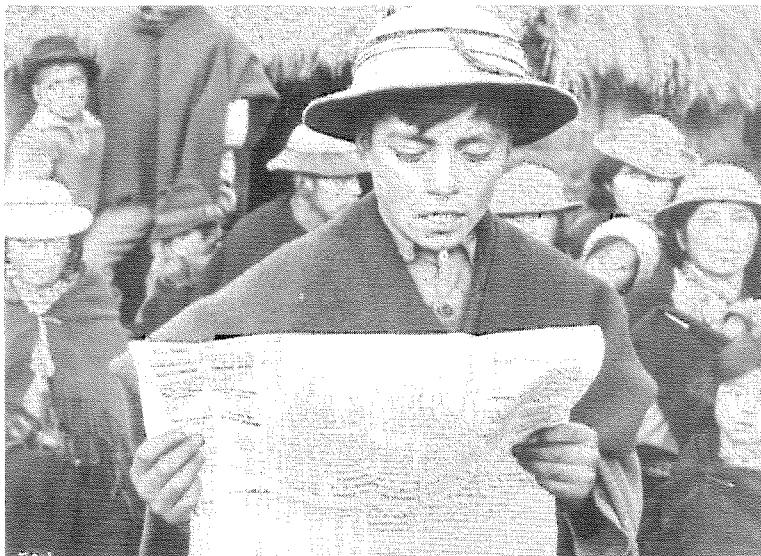
Supplanting the spectacle: *Fuera de aqui* ('Get Out of Here!') directed by Jorge Sanjines.

Finally, Third World film-makers can adopt an anti-spectacular strategy based on a process of re-spectacularisation/de-spectacularisation. This third strategy, a composite of all three possibilities, involves the critical adaptation of forms of dominant cinematic discourse in a three-part process of mimesis, negation or subversion, and substitution. (Cuban film-makers have been particularly drawn to this third strategy, making a number of 'deconstructive' films which critique the very genre they

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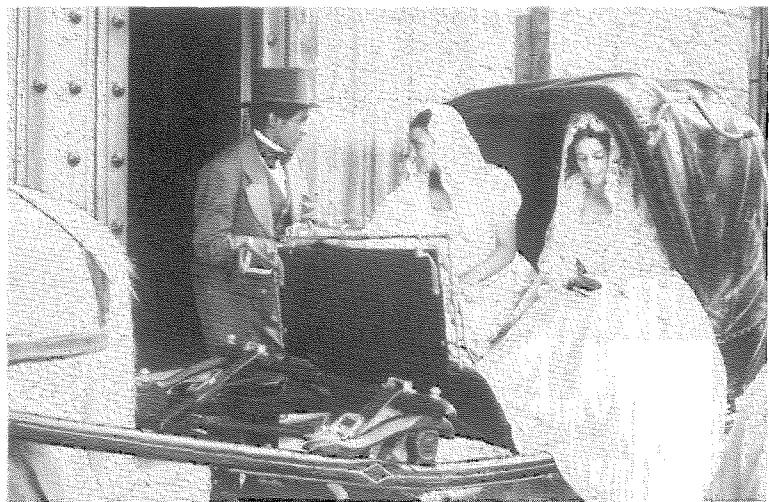
A critique of
historical melodrama:
The Other Francisco.

adopt. *One Way or Another* (1974/77) subverts the Hollywood romance; *The Other Francisco* (1975) critiques the historical melodrama; *Bay of Pigs* (1973) simultaneously imitates and subverts the blood-and-guts war movie.)

Though inclusive of all oppositional Third World film practice, it should be noted that the three strategies outlined above are only relatively, rather than absolutely, discrete. Does the Cuban trilogy *Lucia* (1968), for example, belong in the first category or in the third, or does it upon closer examination also participate in the second strategy? It could be argued that each of its three segments bears a particular affinity to one of the three categories: Part II, in its patent nostalgia for classical Hollywood-style romance, corresponds to the mimetic strategy; Part III, with its voice-over narration in sung folk verse, represents a quest for substitute indigenous forms; while the operatic exaggeration of Part I can be seen as subtly deconstructive in its parodic impulse. Alternatively, it can be argued that the three-part assemblage, because of the formal diversity of its component parts, is implicitly deconstructive in its revelation of the historicity and artificiality of cinematic forms. Like *Lucia, Chuquiago* (Bolivia, 1977) is made up of multiple 'discrete' segments. Yet because the formal distinctions between the four sections are not systematically marked, the Bolivian film inhabits the first, mimetic category with much more docility.

Moving from the level of discrete practice (texts) to the level of cinema as a socio-political practice (regional or national cinema movements), it is important to note that rather than becoming more cohesive over the past two decades, Third World film practice has become more 'diffuse', demonstrating varying degrees of marginality and oppositionality. In many Third World countries, the state, pursuing a policy of 'import substitution' in the cultural sphere, has entered into film production, distribution and sometimes exhibition. Brazilian and Indian national film production now qualitatively rivals Hollywood's output. Production in
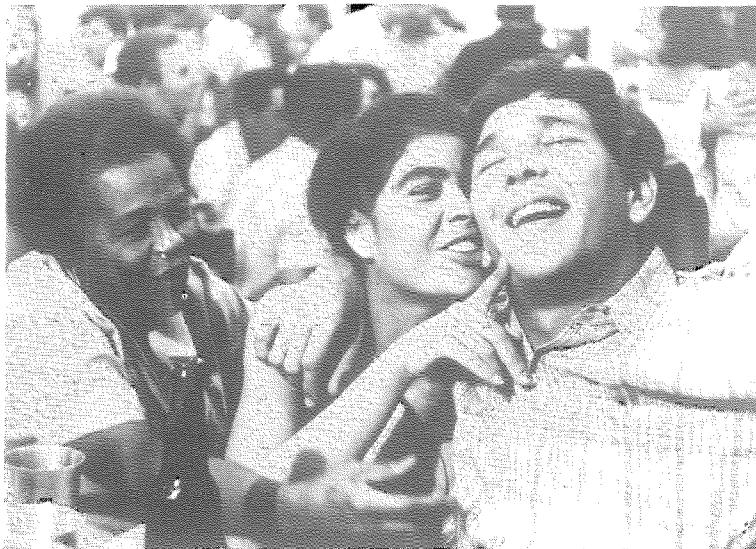
Mimetic, indigenous, parodic: the multiple strategies of *Lucia*.

the Asian country is regionally de-centralised, while the largest of the Latin American film producers has pursued a more centralising strategy. In both countries, a crop of new independents challenges 'dominant' film-makers like Satyajit Ray and the exponents of Cinema Novo, whose own practice represented the apex of oppositionality only two decades ago. Independents who choose for whatever reason to remain outside the system of state support assume a double marginality and a double oppositionality: vis-à-vis the developed sector outside their country, and vis-à-vis the state sector within it. Technological advances and the rise of the electronic media have also contributed to a growing diversity among Third World producers of moving images who increasingly have the option of working in Super-8 or video or a combination of filmic media unknown a decade ago. A counter-tendency, the quest for the Third World superproduction, has figured prominently in the recent history of Latin American film-making.[18]

A brief look at a specific national film movement should illustrate how modes of cinematic production and consumption in the Third World continue, even in the socialist sector, to be shaped by both industrial and anti-industrial, commercial and anti-commercial, traditional and innovative tendencies, displaying – even within a single institution in a single country – varying degrees of oppositionality and marginality. On the level of content, Cuban films continue to display a consistently and aggressively oppositional stance vis-à-vis Western capitalist ideologies, but on a formal level the past decade has seen a return to the transparency of traditional, 'classic' film style and the decline of the deconstructive approach which characterised many notable films from the '60s through to the mid-'70s. On a contextual level, with reference to the organisation and relations of production, ICAIC, the Cuban Film Institute, has been reorganised along more 'rational' and 'productive' lines with heightened attention to profitability. (Salary scale among directors

[18] Most notably in the work of exiled Chilean director Miguel Littin; most disastrously in *Cecilia* (d. Humberto Solas, 1981) which greatly exceeded its budget and demoralised the Cuban Film Institute.

is now differentiated according to productivity; they can be financially penalised for exceeding their estimated production schedules, or rewarded for completing a film in less than the time allotted. The distribution sector now purchase films outright from the production sector, and the finances of the two units have been formally separated. Economic constraints now influence decisions about which proposals will be realised to an unprecedented degree.) Exhibition, on the other hand, has been increasingly decentralised in recent years, as the policies and operation of most theatres around the island have been ceded to local control. Though ICAIC allows a high degree of diversity in the form and content of the films it produces, Cuba has done relatively little to promote film-making activity outside the ranks of the Institute, thus passively discouraging 'infra-oppositional' impulses which might derive from amateur independent cinema and/or video activity. Finally, a good deal of effort has been directed toward diversifying modes of reception and critically empowering viewers through prime-time television programmes and other events which demystify cinematic language and technique, while the level of film criticism in the Cuban print media remains deplorably low. Such conflicting tendencies must be analysed within the dynamics of both the domestic and the international political process, since even the most 'independent' Third World countries must constantly contend with constraints generated by external actions and interests over which they have little if any control.[19]

For Gabriel, the exploration of the psychodynamics of signification in Third World films is just as unnecessary as ideological interrogation, for Third Cinema 'does not function on a psychological or mythic level but rather takes up an explicit position with respect to an ideological or social topic' (p 7). Yet a number of leading critics of socially-committed art, from Georg Lukács to Annette Kuhn, have posited the social-historical component of character *in addition to* rather than *in place of* the psychological.[20] To question the applicability of Western mythic paradigms in Third World cultural contexts is justifiable; to deny a mythic dimension in Third World cultural products is incomprehensible. What is needed is not the (continued) exclusion of psychoanalytical considerations from the critical discourse regarding Third World film, but the expansion or modification of those considerations to accommodate a less Westernised, individually-based notion of being-in-the-world.

In the conclusion to *Pictures of Reality*, Terry Lovell makes the following observations apropos of a Brechtian model of politicised art:

Despite his insistence on the importance of art as entertainment, [Brecht] was a rationalist. Political action ... was to be mediated by thought, not feeling ... Similarly, progressive or revolutionary texts are essentially texts which make us think rather than texts which indulge us in pleasures. The rhetoric of making the ... audience/reader into a producer of meanings ... is a rhetoric based upon one kind of work, the intellectual labour of thinking. Resistance to this particular strand of puritanism is not to be conflated with anti-intellectualism. It is simply to deny that pleasure is or ought to be always at the service of knowledge, and that politics is only served by

[19] For a fuller discussion of the organisation and administrative changes affecting the Cuban Film Institute, see Julianne Burton, 'Film and Revolution in Cuba: The First Twenty-Five Years', in John Kirk and Sandor Halebsky (eds), *Cuba: Twenty-Five Years of Revolution*, New York, Praeger, forthcoming, 1985.

[20] See Annette Kuhn, op cit, p 140-142.

pleasure through the mediation of knowledge.

This leaves an area in which little work has been done, which touches upon questions of pleasure of a kind which neither the psychoanalytic nor the Brechtian approach touch: social pleasures. The pleasures of a test may be grounded in pleasures of an essentially public and social kind. For instance, pleasures of common experiences identified and celebrated in art, and through this celebration, given recognition and validation; pleasures of solidarity to which this sharing may give rise; pleasure in shared and socially defined aspirations and hopes; in a sense of identity and community. Like the desires of the unconscious, they are not in themselves either progressive or reactionary; but a political aesthetics . . . ignores this dimension at its peril.[21]

Current research into the psychology of infant perception and cognition emphasises the profoundly social, interactive nature of human beings from the first hours and days of life. Capacities for bonding and initiating communication and exchange with both adults and peers are increasingly recognised as pre-dating language acquisition. Psychoanalysis has emphasised the process of individuation, the formation of an isolated and isolating subjectivity. Critical theory based on a psychoanalytical model which postulates the pivotal role of language acquisition has attempted to expose the belief in the autonomy of the individual ego as the deception through which ideology enlists our complicity.[22] But what of the hypothesis that in certain non-Western societies, however similar or distinct the process of subject differentiation in infancy, there is a concomitant process of socialisation, which fosters the social, psychological and emotional integration of the individual into the group? The result of such a process would be a more integrative interactional concept of being-in-the-world and the consequent absence or diminution of the extreme forms of individualisation which are assumed in the West to be one of the essences of human nature.

Bolivian director Jorge Sanjines tells the story behind his group's nearly failed attempt to shoot *Blood of the Condor* (1969) in a remote Andean village as a lesson in the inapplicability of Western assumptions about social hierarchies and the relationship of the individual to the group:

Finally we realized where we had gone wrong. We had judged the community by the same standards with which one analyzes people and groups within bourgeois society. We had thought that by mobilizing one man who was powerful and influential we could mobilize the rest of the group, whom we assumed to be vertically dependent on their leader. We had not understood . . . that the Indians gave priority to collective over individual interests. We had failed to grasp that for them, as for their ancestors, what was not good for all of them could not be good for a single one.[23]

Sanjines also remarks upon the fact that, in contrast to a certain Western inclination to bask alone in the limelight, he could not persuade any Indian to act as cinematic spokesperson without sharing the frame with a number of his peers. Ousmane Sembène's films based on African tribal

[21] Terry Lovell, *Pictures of Reality: Aesthetics, Politics and Pleasure,* London, BFI, 1980, pp 94-95.

[22] For useful explanations and applications of these intricate arguments, see Bill Nichols, *Ideology and the Image: Social Representation in the Cinema and Other Media,* Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1981 and Annette Kuhn, op cit.

[23] Jorge Sanjines, 'Cine Revolucionario: La Experiencia Boliviana', *Cine Cubano* no 76/77, 1972, pp 9-12 (my translation).

tradition – *Emitai* (1971) and *Ceddo* (1977) – similarly portray collectivised rather than individual action as the customary social mode. Such examples suggest another concept of being-in-the-world which has far-ranging implications for notions of creativity, meaning production, and the relationship between culture and society. Such a social concept of being or unity allows for and explains precisely the kind of 'social pleasures' emphasised by Terry Lovell above – those pleasures which derive from and generate a sense of ethnic, community, class, national, or gender-based rather than purely individual identity, as well as a sense of common goals and progress toward them. In such circumstances, cinema assumes a kind of auto-ethnographic impulse; it becomes a tool in the discovery and expression of previously unrepresented or under-represented aspects of the 'self' as social and cultural being.

IV.

Gabriel's dismissal of cine-semiotics, a terminological umbrella which arguably shelters the greater portion of what is currently regarded as mainstream critical theory, represents a scepticism common to a number of Third World film critics, but no longer to all. Nineteen eight-two, the year Gabriel's *Third Cinema in the Third World* was published, also saw the completion of another doctoral dissertation by a Third World critic on a Third World film topic. The contrast in approaches is striking. Brazilian Ismail Xavier's *Allegories of Underdevelopment: From the 'Aesthetics of Hunger' to the 'Aesthetics of Garbage'*[24] is much narrower in its focus, concentrating on 'the trajectory of the Brazilian independent film in the 1960's' (p 4), but it is the richly syncretic nature of the work which I want to emphasise here. Xavier performs a series of textual analyses which coalesce into a kind of national intellectual, cultural and political meta-history capable of illuminating not only the period under study but subsequent developments as well.

Xavier's study differentiates itself from cinematic historiography as customarily practiced in Brazil. Where his predecessors have emphasised plot structures or the thematics of specific directors, Xavier places the concept of mediation at the core of his analysis and the articulation of cinematic specificity at the centre of his method: 'Cinematic storytelling is a multi-leveled process and the analysis of *mediation* in films entails a detailed account of the combination of such specifically cinematic procedures as camera work, editing strategies, off-screen narration, dialogue, *mise-en-scene*, image/sound relationship' (p 2). His theoretical framework consequently 'draw[s] upon the...basic descriptive categories of film theory and criticism: montage theory as founded in Eisenstein's work, the characterization of classic *découpage* (Bazin, Burch), work on modern narrative cinema (Christian Metz, PP Pasolini) and the theory of identification concerning the cinematic "apparatus" inflected by contemporary psychoanalytic research' (p 2). From the Anglo-European literary critical traditional Xavier adopts the ancient hermeneutical figure of allegory as the principal focus of his study, borrowing from work by Angus Fletcher, Erich Auerbach, Jean Pepin, Walter

[24] Ann Arbor, University Microfilms, 1982. (Further page references in the text.)

Benjamin and Paul deMan. According to his interpretation, the meta-
phors of hunger and garbage which Brazilian film-makers of different
generations have chosen to describe their cinematic project involve a
recognition of film's direct involvement with advanced technology and a
simultaneous act of resistance to this fact through the creation 'of a
cinema that turns scarcity itself into a signifier' (p 17). His synthesis of
textual and historical approaches transcends the potential contributions
of each approach in isolation, charting a new direction within Brazilian
film studies and Third World film study in general.

Examples of other kinds of 'rapproachment' between the marginal and
the mainstream have recently appeared or are on the verge of appearing
in print. *Screen* has published three of these: Robert Stam and Louise
Spence's outline of a methodology for approaching the representation of
colonialism and racism in the cinema, Homi K Bhabha's theorisation of
the ambivalent and contradictory stereotype as the major represent-
ational strategy in colonial discourse, and my own interpretation of a
particular Third World film text as a working out in practice of the most
problematic areas of contemporary critical theory.[25] Robert Kolker's *The
Altering Eye: Contemporary International Cinema*[26] is the first major con-
temporary history to give Third World films more than token attention.
Kolker focuses on films 'made in a spirit of resistance, rebellion, and
refusal', and more specifically on 'films made in Europe and Latin
America . . . in reaction to American cinema, often to America itself, yet
dependent upon . . . the conventions and attitudes of American films and
culture . . . ' (Preface). He argues that 'in fact no direct split between
filmmaking in America and elsewhere exists. There is rather an interplay
in which the dominant style (or styles) of American movies are always
present to be denied, expanded upon, embraced, and rejected, only to be
embraced again' (p 5). Zuzana Pick's work on Chilean cinema in exile
calls attention to a different zone of interplay between margin and
mainstream. She argues that for many Chilean film-makers, the fact of
exile in countries throughout Europe and North America 'has provided
the necessary distance to question some of the ideological elements that
determine their political and cinematic perception of reality' because
they have had to confront the 'personal paradox' of immersion in socie-
ties and cultures of the developed world which have historically
colonised their own. The inevitable result is a questioning of the rheto-
rical and representational strategies characteristic of oppositional film-
making in Latin America and a closer, though continually questioning,
linkage to the metropolitan avant-garde.[27] A forthcoming book by Roy
Armes[28] effectively situates African, Asian and Latin American cinema
within the requisite context of an international political and cultural
economy of film production.

V.

What 'First World' critical theory brings to Third World film practices
is, above all, the revelation of mediation as essential to any act of com-
munication. The issue is not the elimination of mediators and inter-

[25] Robert Stam and
Louise Spence,
'Colonialism, Racism
and Representation:
An Introduction',
Screen March-April
1983, vol 24 no 2, pp
2-20; Homi K
Bhabha, 'The Other
Question – The
Stereotype and
Colonial Discourse',
Screen November-
December, 1983, vol
24 no 6, pp 18-36;
Julianne Burton,
'The Politics of
Aesthetic Distance:
The Presentation of
Representation in Sao
Bernardo.' *Screen*
March-April 1983,
vol 24 no 2, pp 20-53.

[26] Oxford University
Press, 1983.

[27] Zuzana M Pick,
'Chilean Cinema:
Ten Years of Exile
(1973-1983)', work in
progress.

[28] Roy Armes, *Third
World Film Making
and the West*,
University of
California Press,
forthcoming.

[29] For a provocative consideration of these questions in the realm of the fine arts, see Carol Duncan, 'Who Rules the Art World?', *Socialist Review* no 70, July-August, 1983, pp 99-119.

[30] Michael Chanan, *Chilean Cinema*, op cit, p 84.

mediaries, as García Espinosa proposed, but rather the self-conscious assumption of the mediating role of the critic as one (meta-mediation) among many. Though the specific practical function of the critic is certainly open to ideological interrogation, particularly in the 'art marketplace' of the West[29], the general role of criticism needs to be understood as (among other things) a more informed, specialised, public act of reception. Oppositional film-makers throughout the Third World have asserted, like Chilean director Miguel Littin, that 'There is no such thing as a film that is revolutionary in itself; it only becomes such through the contact that it establishes with its public and principally through its influence as a mobilizing agent for revolutionary action'.[30] This conception of the film as activated through viewer response is fundamentally inconsistent with a cultural politics which denies the links between reception and critical analysis. When should reception — the simultaneous viewing and interpreting of a film, the interaction of artifact and receiver which produces meaning — *not* be critical in the most fundamental sense? As in Paolo Freire's concept of education for critical consciousness, criticism presupposes the active enlistment of the subject as social agent.

Critical theory from the developed sector continues to develop methodologies and conceptual vocabularies which recognise reciprocal interaction (dialectics), acknowledge oppositionality as process rather than stasis, and purport to find ways of identifying and articulating gaps, discontinuities, fissures, fragmentations, opacity, ambivalence and other contradictory practices inevitably inscribed in acts of communication. Explicit methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks are simply means of making the mechanisms of reception manifest. Both are evolving rather than immutable constructs. The degree to which post-structuralist thought, for example, has incorporated the insights and concerns of feminist thinkers testifies to this evolutionary potential. Current critical emphasis on the mechanisms of gender-differentiation in the cinema and the concomitant privileging of forms of male subjectivity demonstrate both the openness to and the productivity of more politicised approaches. A complementary emphasis on the effects of racial, ethnic and class differentiation, and on the dominant cinema's denial of history and the social tensions which fuel it, must also be made. The most logical source of this transformative feedback are the critics and historians whose theoretical and practical knowledge of Third World cultural expression provides the grounding for an informed assessment of the limitations and blindspots of critical-theoretical practices developed in the metropolis and exercised almost exclusively upon the products of metropolitan culture. Without cognisance of mainstream critical theory, critics of Third World film are inadequate to this task, and without modification in light of Third World realities and practices, Western critical theory is also insufficient.

What, then, can Third World film practice bring to First World critical theory aside from simply a more 'otherly' sphere of otherness, and a mandate to recognise and articulate the modes of representation of that otherness in both colonial and anti-colonising discourse? The introduc-

tion of instances of greater cultural and historical specificity asserts the
need for a broader contextualisation which would include a more effec-
tive sociology and political economy of cultural production, applicable –
and essential – to the dominant as well as the dependent sector. .

Third World cultures offer 'living museums' where four stages of
world culture (collective art and ritual, the unique 'masterpiece', mass
culture in an age of mechanical reproduction, and mass culture in an era
of electronic dissemination) exist simultaneously and often remarkably
discretely. This fragile cultural heterogeneity points up multiple cate-
gories of cultural-historical specificity: intra-cultural (subcultural vari-
ations of race, class, gender, ethnicity, etc, within a given national
culture), cross-cultural (between contemporary cultures), and trans-
historical (within and between cultures across historical markers).

Third World film practice emphasises and requires *practical theory,*
functional vocabulary and skills which, in contrast to a restricted dis-
course of initiates, are transferable across lines of social stratification.
The corollary emphasis on concrete uses over abstract essences demands
an ability to recognise and account for transformative practices in the
spheres of production, diffusion, reception. The study of the production
of meaning cannot be limited to the film text, but must theorise that text
as process as well as product. Third World cultural practices require a
model which recognises a world outside individual subjectivity, a world
in need of improvement, and affirms the social possibility of transform-
ing it. In challenging cultural critics to recognise and articulate pleasure
and desire as social rather than exclusively individual experiences,
oppositional cultural practices from the Third World bear the promise
of unifying the presently polarised view of culture as either a 'privatized
realm of personal enrichment' or a 'socializing realm of ideological sig-
nificance'[31]. A view of culture in which the realm of ideological signifi-
cance is not incompatible with the realm of personal enrichment
(because personal enrichment is also viewed as a social phenomenon)
would free Western critics from the onerous role of 'diagnostician of
pathologies', reaffirming instead their function as guide and celebrant.
For these reasons, the selective appropriation and transformation of
'appropriate critical technologies' is a strategy capable of enhancing the
practice and the theory of both marginal and mainstream, metropolitan
and peripheral, cultures and societies.

[31] Bill Nichols (ed),
introduction to
Movies and Methods,
Vol 2, op cit.

ERRATUM

Unfortunately, some pages of Roy Armes'
article in this issue, 'Black African Cinema
in the Eighties', have been transposed.
Pages 62 and 63 should follow on after
page 67 and before page 68. Apologies
from the editor to readers and Roy Armes.

Echoes of Empire

British Film Institute
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THE PURE LAND BEYOND THE SEAS: BARTHES, BURCH AND THE. USES OF JAPAN

BY SCOTT L MALCOMSON

THE CRITICISM OF Japanese cinema was something of a narrow field in the West until the later '70s, when Noël Burch wrote *To the Distant Observer*, and it was becoming apparent that Japan might be fertile territory for new theories. The work of Donald Richie, in particular, had become more or less canonical. *To the Distant Observer*, with its eclectic post-structuralist/semiotic/Marxist approach, was a pioneer text – and still is, as it remains the only large-scale critical work on the Japanese cinema to attempt to incorporate the theoretical innovations of the last twenty years, particularly those of French origin.

Burch's work was inspired in part by Roland Barthes's *Empire of Signs*, first published in France in 1970. Although the specifics of their analyses differ greatly, they have a (roughly) shared epistemology – a crucial portion of which I hope to illuminate in this essay, namely, the uses to which Japan, as the cultural Other, is put, and what is accomplished, in terms of Japan's present and future, by the authors' theoretical strategies. These questions are of particular importance, it seems to me, because the ideological roles of cultural Otherness constitute the key problematic in Western criticism of Japanese film.

[1] Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs* (trans Richard Howard), New York, Hill and Wang, 1982, p 3.

I. BARTHES

In Barthes's *Empire of Signs* the notion of Japan hovers above his text like a flag of convenience. The book, it is emphasised repeatedly, is not about Japan; for Barthes, the Orient (a term that is loosely interchanged with Japan) 'is a matter of indifference, merely providing a reserve of features whose manipulation – whose invented interplay – allows me to "entertain" the idea of an unheard-of symbolic system, one altogether detached from our own'.[1] He could have created a purely imaginary land in which to site this 'invented interplay' – except that Japan, by coincidence, provides ready-made the phenomena that enable Barthes to write his system.

Such an approach may seem disingenuous in the extreme, and for good

reason. Despite assurances to the contrary, I believe *The Empire of Signs* to be firmly in the tradition of orientalism – literary, artistic, ethnographic.[2] Barthes's concession that his reading of Japan is simply a manipulation of handy cultural features (from that archetypal faraway, the Orient) is less an admission than a mystification, as is often the case with non-specific, purely theoretical attempts at reflexivity. It is a mystification because it assumes, or better *asserts*, a radical decontextualisation of the phenomena of Japan, of Japaneseness, of both the mundanities and the philosophical traditions of that country – in the name of a 'higher' veracity of purpose, the honesty of recognising a fundamental subjectivity. One might say that such an approach to these phenomena, ranging from tempura to the Japanese eyelid to the practices of Zen, would free them up, offering an opportunity for unconstrained reflection. But to detach these from other phenomena (Pearl Harbor, Sony TV sets, news footage of morning calisthenics at the Toyota plant) is not only a disturbing rhetorical conceit, it becomes a violence, an attempt to enforce acculturation.

What is being hidden and communicated in this attempt – the object of acculturation – is Barthes's notion of the absenting of meaning, the silencing through nullity of the noise of thought (of signification). The Japanese phenomenon which is chosen as the most explicitly theoretical vehicle for Barthes's idea is Zen, and particularly some instances of the form of poetry called haiku:

*All of Zen, of which the haiku is merely the literary branch, thus appears as an enormous praxis destined to **halt language**, to jam that kind of internal radiophony continually **sending** in us, even in our sleep ... to empty out, to stupefy, to dry up the soul's incoercible babble; and perhaps what Zen calls **satori** ... is no more than a panic suspension of language, the blank which erases in us the reign of the Codes, the breach of that internal recitation which constitutes our person; and if this state of **a-language** is a liberation, it is because, for the Buddhist experiment, the proliferation of secondary thoughts (the thought of thought), or what might be called the infinite supplement of supernumerary signifieds – a circle of which language itself is the depository and the model – appears as a jamming: it is on the contrary the **abolition** of secondary thought which breaks the vicious infinity of language. In all these experiments, apparently, it is not a matter of crushing language beneath the mystic silence of the ineffable, but of **measuring it**, of halting that verbal top which sweeps into its gyration of the obsessional play of symbolic substitutions. In short, it is the symbol as semantic operation which is attacked.*[3]

· One sees here the use of a Japanese Zen Buddhism as the vehicle for Barthes's wish for an end to 'the soul's incoercible babble'. One sees also the veiling mechanism whereby the historically existent Zen is lost in the glare of Barthes's theoretical project. Issues in Zen Buddhism, e.g., the breach between 'Northern' (gradualist) and 'Southern' (sudden) methodologies for attaining *satori*, the problem of proselytisation, the conflict between rules (of artistic production, social deportment, sexual behaviour, etc) and the experience of *satori*, Zen's complex, ambivalent rela-

[2] Although there are many important differences between Barthes's and Burch's Japan and the Orient of the Orientalist, as described by Edward Said in his *Orientalism* (New York, Pantheon Books, 1978), they both perform the essential Orientalist operation analysed by Said: 'Yet what gave the Oriental's world its intelligibility and identity was not the result of his own efforts but rather the whole complex series of knowledgeable manipulations by which the Orient was identified by the West.' See especially the Introduction and pp 40, 60, 71, 328.

[3] Roland Barthes, op cit, pp 74-75.

tion to death, the concept of suitableness, the influence of Taoism ... these issues exist as part of the term Zen, they can't be discarded. To do so is 1) to appropriate the legitimacy, historicity, 'authenticity', exotic nature, etc, of Zen (and by extension the East) in the service of Barthes, and 2) to give the reader the opportunity to perform a similar appropriation, that is, be able to consume the presented artifacts of an Other (Japan) while evading the labour of analysis within, to some degree, the terms of the culture from which those artifacts have been taken.

It is this last point which most nearly brings together the 'form' and 'content' of *The Empire of Signs*, for in both there is an argument for the absence (absenting) of meaning, and it is ultimately this argument which enables and disguises the act of consumption mentioned above. In the overall plan of *The Empire of Signs*, meaning is absented from the Other (faraway, Japan); in the specific content, meaning is absented from the cultural phenomena selected by Barthes, whether literary products (haiku) or simple actions (taking a seat). This strategy allows one to experience the rewards of consumption – of haiku, of Japan, and finally of meaning – while evading the responsibility and difficulties of a true reflexivity, which must recognise that subjectivity cannot simply be acknowledged at the outset then forgotten, as an initial gesture of good will. The chief virtue of such an approach to reflexive cultural analysis – e.g., 'I admit now that this work is a fiction' – is its economy.

How can an argument for 'the absence of meaning' enable the consumption of meaning? Certainly the next best thing to ending 'the soul's incoercible babble' is to hide it, in this case to muffle the incessant noise of signification with the idea of non-meaning. Once meaning is denied ('absented from') the object (a poem, a gesture), the pain of understanding is relieved, the babble hushed. But, in the specifics of *The Empire of Signs*, it is inescapable that the objects being considered do have meanings. The face of a Japanese general about to die, a map of Tokyo, a haiku – these examples used by Barthes may be meaningless in one sense (that they *signify an idea* of de-centeredness or emptiness), but they are hardly silent, or in any way exempt from the 'incoercible babble'. The production of meaning continues, like time – *marking* time. 'The absence of meaning' is itself a meaning, like the absurdity of absurdism, or the surreal of surrealism.

And if the production of meaning(s) continues unabated in *The Empire of Signs*, so does their consumption, although at a low level, the signifieds being denied theoretically as they appear. But they have nonetheless been read by the reader. A communication has taken place; meaning has been produced and consumed. Barthes's 'absence of meaning' is little more than the impossible wish for an absence of reading. Increasingly, in the passages on Zen, it takes on the character of a sleight-of-hand, an attempt to fold oneself in an interstice of time – thus, for example, the repetition in *The Empire of Signs* of the phrase *alla prima*. The privileging of the sudden gesture, the moment of non-control, the arbitrary, the innocent – these are familiar romantic pre-occupations of modernism, and they surface here as Japanese Zen. But, of course, the *alla prima*

brushwork of Zen painting is no freer from meaning than the layering of oil paints that is traditional in Western painting. There is still a brush, paper, an artistic tradition, a structure of artistic production and distribution, a shifting body of aesthetic tastes. Japanese Zen aesthetic attitudes allude to a philosophical ideal that is similar to Barthes's attack on the symbol, but they are no freer from the process of signification than anything else. The single brush stroke, the sudden haiku, provide no lasting shelter from meaning.

If *The Empire of Signs* finds itself on the romantic modernist treadmill of 'the spontaneous gesture', the question arises: Why Japan? There are two main reasons: 1) It is much more *interesting* for the reader to read (about) Japan than about some land from Barthes's imagination. He might have written, 'In my imaginary land poems are written that have no meaning.' How much more interesting it is to speak of haiku! Even as Barthes claims no meaning for the Japanese phenomena he examines, it is the denied context (Japaneseness itself is often the primary meaning communicated by his objects) that sustains much of the book's interest. 2) Japan lends the text an authenticity that it would not have if sited in a more familiar locale ('This system I shall call France'). Japan retains an aura of otherness and exoticism, an impression of cultural (more specifically, in Barthes, linguistic and aesthetic) purity. This contrasts with the Western mode of alienation, fragmentation, perhaps corruption. Paradoxically, while Barthes prizes the 'discontinuous' aspects of Japanese cultural practice, it is finally the continuity, the seamlessness, of his Japan that is the source of its attraction. It is, in Barthes's formulation, an independent system, *self-possessed*, a cultural whole. This model of cultural containment is essentially the idea of pre-modern 'primitive' cultural coherence. This prelapsarian purity, a central idea also in *To the Distant Observer*, is the source of the desired authenticity. It is instructive that most of Barthes's material is from before the Second World War, and that the US is repeatedly posed as the metaphorical opposite of Japan. The West, in relation to the pure and fictive Orient, is the violator and transgressor, the vehicle of corruption – a schema of East/West confrontation that, of course, leaves the West with the burden of moral censure but also the historical momentum for domination. This is one way in which the promotion of faraway Japan as innocent Other finally concedes the historical victory to the West that it is condemning. Perhaps the counter-capitalist, anti-West ideology of Primitiveness is in some sense the intellectual battle that is only fought if one has conceded the war.

. It is the pursuit of authenticity that is the key reason for Barthes's use of Japan. After all, what we consume in *Empire of Signs* is a group of phenomena, labelled Japanese, which, crucially, allude to a coherent structure behind them (culture). 'Japan' is presented, so to speak, dressed for the table. And it is finally authenticity, the assurance of coherence (of meaning), and secondarily some rather misrepresented aspects of Japanese culture, that we are *consuming* in *Empire of Signs*. It is that authenticity that sustains interest in the text, for without it the text becomes a mundane presentation of familiar ideas, most notably the preoccupation

with spontaneity discussed above. And it is the beauty of Barthes's approach that this consumption of authenticity is firmly hidden in the attributed content of the book's object (called Japan) – the idea of non-meaning, Barthes's dream of freedom from the incoercible babble of signification. 'Non-meaning' is the veil that allows Barthes, *and the reader*, to consume the product of authenticity while avoiding any attendant responsibility, self-awareness, understanding.

II. BURCH

It is not my intention here to make a thorough critique of *To the Distant Observer*. Nor do I wish to make an empirical criticism of Burch's representations of Japanese film; such a quantitative argument too easily dissembles problems that are, most significantly, theoretical. Rather, my goals are: 1) to tease out the image of Japan that is created in Burch's book; 2) to look at the implications of this particular creation of Japan; 3) to at least speculate on the reasons, within Burch's theoretical approach, for his vision of Japan and Japanese cinema.

I stress the 'creation of Japan' on one hand because of the extreme subjectivity that is almost unavoidable in the imagining of cultural wholes, particularly ones as traditionally paradigmatic as Japan, which has for centuries laboured in the role of cultural Other. This role is continued in *To the Distant Observer*. On the other hand, Burch himself stresses the fictiveness of Japan-as-text, invoking *Empire of Signs* as his precursor and the model of undefiled theory. However, Burch explains in his preface that he will not reproduce Barthes's 'radically theoretical stance' (as opposed to ... radically practical? material?) because it is precluded by 'the specialized nature of my present project'.[4]

That there is a conflict between Barthes's theoretical 'stance' (such a *static* notion is highly appropriate[5]) and any sustained look at Japanese phenomena will not come as a surprise to any reader of *Empire of Signs*. More important for this discussion is Burch's acknowledgement of a breach between the ideal represented by Barthes – the radical fictiveness of Barthes's Empire – and his own specialised text; this breach, moreover he sees as somehow regrettable, in need of healing, perhaps through a more vigorous exercise of that 'rigor' that is so frequently mentioned in *To the Distant Observer*. The key point, in any case, is that Burch perceives a fissure between the phenomena he analyses (films) and the theoretical approaches he wishes to take (Barthes's idealism being one of several; the other main influence is Marxism). Burch's creation of Japan – his delineation of the Japanese 'essence' – is, as we shall see, an attempt to repair this fissure. The awkward result is a particular idealisation of Japan, the nature and implications of which I will analyse below.

Burch states early on his central ambition for the Japanese cinema:

The people who most need to study this cinema in its most 'radically Japanese' form are those committed to constructing a thorough-going critique of the dominant modes of Western cinema. This critique, inscribed within seventy-

[4] Noël Burch, *To the Distant Observer*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1979, p 16.

[5] For a discussion of stasis in Barthes's work on film, and some general reflections on the importance of stasis to the semiological enterprise, see Vlada Petric, 'Barthes versus Cinema', in *Sight and Sound*, Summer 1983.

6 Noël Burch, op cit, p 17.

7 ibid, p 25.

five years of film practice in Japan, remains unread. It is this reading which I hope to initiate here.[6]

The Japanese cinema, then, is to be a counter-argument to the 'dominant Western mode of representation'. The features of this counter-argument include: a rejection of the sacrosanct nature of the Western text; a thorough anti-centrism, especially anti-anthropocentrism; a preference for presentation over representation; a critique of realism (e.g., the transparency of the signifier); a critique of Western individualism; and an ingrained awareness of surface and form. These features, with their myriad implications, constitute a Japanese cultural practice in opposition, according to Burch, to the Western representational mode, the characteristics of which in cinema follow the 'codes' (of editing, framing, plot, characterisation, etc) as developed in Hollywood. This dominant mode is determined according to the needs of the bourgeoisie and the status, in a given period, of Western capitalism.

I present Burch's argument in this impoverished, schematic form only because my concern lies less with the content of his ideas as such than with the kind of Japaneseness they create or require. For at the core of Burch's efforts there is a need for a *Japanese essence*, a cultural unity that can be delimited and referred to. Burch's Japan is, not surprisingly, a Primitive one, that is, its essential aspects are said to reflect an ancient cultural continuity. His analysis of Japanese texts actually begins with the earliest period of developed literary practice – the Heian era, from the ninth to the twelfth centuries, during which 'the pertinent traits of Japanese aesthetics were defined almost entirely ... '[7]. It is these traits that Burch finds in the Japanese cinema, particularly in the films of the '30s. It is, in turn, this cultural coherence that Burch sees as being violated after World War II, by the intervention of Western imperialism and the restructuring of the Japanese mode of production along capitalist lines, as opposed to the pre-war structure, which is loosely defined as feudal.

Between this pre-lapsarian model of Japanese cultural cohesiveness – the Fall coinciding with the arrival of capitalism – and the political counter-argument Burch hopes to make with it lies a large field of contradictions. These contradictions arrange themselves along an axis more or less determined by the conflicts between a politically 'progressive' aesthetics (the unified system of 'pre-bourgeois' Japan) and the either regressive or non-mass-based role that the products of that aesthetics played in twentieth-century Japan. The most obvious example of the first conflict is the fact that some of the furthest developments of a specifically Japanese aesthetic, in Burch's analysis, occurred as part of the cultural mobilisation to support Japanese imperialism in the Pacific War. Examples of the second conflict, whereby the greatest refinements, in Burch's estimation, of a specifically Japanese cinema turn out to be films that were unappealing to the great majority of Japanese, include Kinugasa's *Page of Madness*, Mizoguchi's *Genroku Chushingura*, and Yoshida's *Eros Plus Massacre*. This disjunction between art and politics – which, as I hope to demonstrate, is the result of Burch's project and not necessarily inherent in Japan's history – is apparent in both the content and the structure of

Burch's analysis.

29

The 'essential Japanese aesthetics', the base for Burch's critique of Western bourgeois capitalism, developed in the context of a feudal society. Many of the connections between the aesthetic forms Burch outlines and the objective needs of a feudal ruling class are fairly clear. A rejection of the 'closed text' can ultimately work toward enforcing the conformity of the individual in the con-text of society—since in Japanese aesthetics the closed text can be a step toward its control, as well as a way of isolating it from its surroundings. A rejection of linearity is in some sense in opposition to progressiveness, and thereby the predisposition to political (ideological) action for change. The extreme importance attached to surface and form could be seen as inseparable from the feudal Japanese preoccupation with social position, hierarchy, and the immutability of societal organisation. Indeed, even the Japanese rejection of 'the transparency of the signifier', in that it might encourage the quietude of a profound subjectivity, is not at all inherently progressive or even radical.

As Burch states, the decade in which these pre-bourgeois aesthetic values reached their cinematic maturation, the 1930s, 'was above all the crucible of a quasi-fascist militarism'.[8] After noting the complicity of Ozu and Mizoguchi in the cultural mobilisation, Burch writes, 'we may say that a vast majority of more or less forgotten directors contributed to the ideological consolidation of the régime precisely to the extent that their films aided the reactivation of traditional values without which the specificity of the Japanese cinema could not have developed ... and this is a basic, irreducible dialectic.'[9] He summarises the compatibility of the fully realised Japanese cinematic aesthetic with the war effort as 'another aspect of a complex dialectical process, involving more than one uncomfortable contradiction'.[10] Yet it is not contradictory that the most culturally specific, purest development of a cultural product (cinema) should coincide with the most inward and nationalistic period of that country's modern history. On the contrary, the contradiction is between the role in Burch's ideology for the pure Japanese cultural system and the political purposes which that system served in its own, Japanese historical context.

In discussing the post-war period, the conflict between Burch's ideological intentions for traditional aesthetics and their actual political role centres on two political trends—the liberal humanism of the '50s and early '60s, notably that of Kurosawa, and the left avant-garde of the '60s and early '70s. The Kurosawa section is transitional; in it Burch's Western-oriented ideology, which is more or less latent in the earlier chapters, becomes increasingly apparent. In the analysis of Kurosawa's Japaneseness Burch's argument takes a subtle but important turn. The received notion about Kurosawa, which Burch seems to share, is that he mastered the Western film-making technique, then went beyond it into specifically Japanese variations on those Western forms. This is dangerous territory, for here begins a shift in the valuative ground from cultural purity (the more Japanese the film the better, or more mature, it is) to a two-stage progression in which a film-maker must first master the basics, which are unavoidably derived from dominant Western practice, and

[8] ibid, p 262.

[9] ibid, p 263; the ellipses are Burch's.

[10] ibid, p 269.

[11] ibid, p 295.

[12] ibid, p 25; citing
Earle Ernst, *The
Kabuki Theatre*, New
York, Grove Press,
1956, pp 67, 68.

[13] Noël Burch, op cit,
p 125.

[14] ibid, p 248. This
notion of directors as
pure cultural
reflectors alludes to
Burch's valuing of a
particular kind of
innocence – the
guileless embodiment
of culture.

[15] ibid, p 297fn.

[16] ibid, pp 318, 319.

then add his or her own (possibly deconstructive) layer. It is because of this shift that Burch can write with confidence of 'Kurosawa's sense of timing and framing, his mastery of editing and of the direction of actors . . .'[11] as if there is some agreed-upon, non-cultural standard for these activities. On the contrary, this notion of basic competence – the film-school aesthetic – is precisely what Burch has inveighed against. After all, much of Ozu's work could be characterised as poorly edited and miserably directed, according to the critical standards that Burch invokes regarding Kurosawa.

This creeping-in of conventional Western standards of cinematic quality is coincident with an increasing tendency to value films that are undeniably avant-garde and explicitly political. A conflict is created between Burch's working notion of films as pure cultural phenomena and the responses of the Japanese to those films. Burch's desire to identify and valorise an aesthetic system that can be called the Japanese essence leads him, quite naturally, into the dilemma of cultural consensus. If he has located an essence, then presumably it must be apparent in the activities and tastes of a majority of Japanese; therefore, the popular culture must be the prime focus of his study. For this reason, Burch is often at pains to show the mass roots of his objects of study. His portrayal of early Japan emphasises its homogeneity and *classlessness*, so that the unified cultural aesthetic he derives might be free from the taint of being a ruling ideology or dominant practice. Earle Ernst is quoted to the effect that 'the long isolation of the country created a uniformity of habits, beliefs, and tastes among all classes'.[12] Burch argues that the representational mode of pre-bourgeois Japan was essentially free of class determinations.

*A basic, inter-class consensus on these matters had existed since time immemorial, illustrated by the rapid and direct development of the aristocratic **no** from the theatre of travelling players and **kabuki** from its early associations with the Edo underworld.*[13]

This pure cultural aesthetic is supposed to have been reflected in the cinema of the 1930s, Burch's Golden Age of Japanese film. And despite his almost auteurist approach, focusing on individual directors and their 'masterpieces', he sees the directors he discusses in the early chapters as 'no more or less than the supreme masters of a unified cultural practice'.[14]

But from Kurosawa on, the gap between the masters and the masses stretches wider and wider – and, coincidentally, those cinematic features that Burch prizes seem more and more distant from that unified cultural practice that is the essential vehicle of his counter-capitalist argument. For example, Kurosawa's commercial successes *Yojimbo* and *Sanjuro* go unanalysed. *Yojimbo* is dismissed as one of Kurosawa's 'most evident pot-boilers'[15]; *Sanjuro* is ignored as 'nothing more than a fusion of the latter-day *chambera* tradition with the Hollywood Western, which gave birth to that Cinecittà hybrid, the spaghetti Western'.[16] It is instructive that a critic whose roots are supposedly popular (interested in films as avatars of popular culture, that is, *with the masses*) would dismiss films
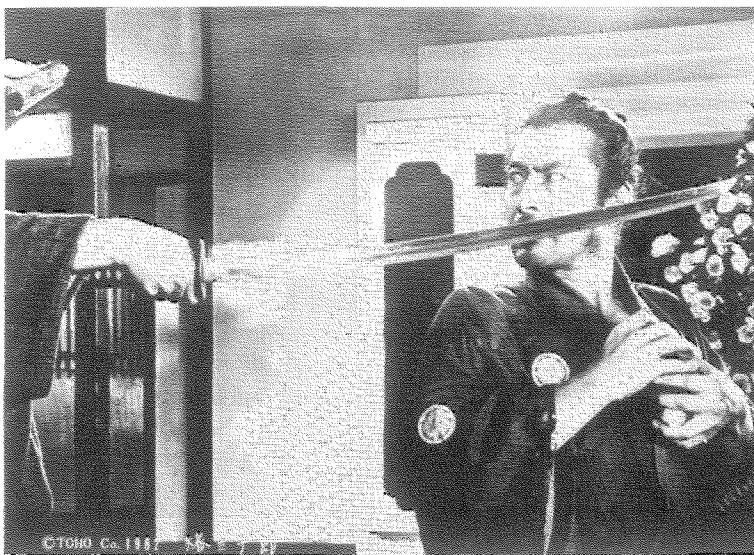
Sanjuro: a spaghetti
Eastern dismissed for
its success?

31

virtually because of their popularity. Moreover, although Burch wants
to compare East and West, he refuses analysis precisely at a point where
it might be most fruitful, where Japanese and Western (American, Ital-
ian) cinematic forms have met.[17] Such inter-breeding, however, would
disturb the purity of the Japanese counter-text.

In analysing the post-Kurosawa cinema, Burch becomes absorbed
more or less completely with the avant-garde. He frames his argument
initially by invoking the possibility of 'a renaissance of a truly Japanese
tradition', in cultural opposition to 'the cosmopolitan concert of inter-
national modernism'.[18] For, despite the regressive uses to which tradi-
tional values are so often put in the progress of Japan's paternalist cor-
porate structure, those attitudes 'at the same time have truly progressive
potentialities, assuming the transformation of production relationships'.[19]

At this point the contradictions between Burch's ideology and its
chosen vehicle – the unified Japanese cultural practice – are sharpened.
The headlong retreat into the avant-garde arrives, not surprisingly, at
those films that are most familiar with a 'materialist theory of art, dialec-
tical and historical in nature, *as it is developing in the West*'.[20] 'Spontan-
eity', the guileless reflection of one's culture, that guarantee of purity,
loses its value here, just as Japan loses its value except as fuel for an ideo-
logical conflict the terms of which are set in the West; it is merely a store-
house of old, potentially useful concepts, paving-stones for Western
barricades. At the same time, many of the aesthetic ideas that were essen-
tial to the cinema of the 1930s seem to lose their cachet. In his fight with
'intentionalist ideology', fought with uneven success throughout the
book, Burch seems finally to succumb to the sheer authorial energy of
Nagisa Oshima. And in discussing the 1971 documentary *People of the
Second Fortress* Burch praises the film-makers' ability to have their
camera and direction '*fit* the rhythms and patterns of the farmers' speech
and behavior'[21] – which sounds strangely like a renaissance of realism.

[17] See David Desser's
excellent article
'Kurosawa's Eastern
"Western": Sanjuro
and the Influence of
Shane', in *Film
Criticism*, Fall 1983.

[18] Noël Burch, op cit,
p 322.

[19] ibid, p 323.

[20] ibid, p 360; the italics
are mine. This shift
in Burch's standards
for determining
which films to
analyse may account
for the mysterious
non-consideration of
the work of Shohei
Imamura. Imamura's
films are presumably
not 'political' enough;
at the same time, his
work may be too
much infiltrated by
the representations
and problems of
contemporary Japan,
and too far from its
Heian 'essence'.

[21] ibid, p 361.

32

22 As in, for example,
Marx's position on
the Polish nationalist
struggle, and Engels's
opposition to Slav
nationalisms; later,
the debates between
Rosa Luxemburg
and, among others,
Eduard Bernstein on
German nationalism.
See J L Talmon, *The
Myth of the Nation
and the Vision of
Revolution*, London,
Secker and Warburg,
1980, especially parts
one and two; Peter
Gay, *The Dilemma of
Democratic Socialism,
Eduard Bernstein's
Challenge to Marx*,
New York, Columbia
University Press,
1952, pp 277-295.
My understanding of
contemporary left
approaches to
nationalism has been
greatly influenced by
Tom Nairn, *The
Break-up of Britain*,
particularly the
chapters 'The
Modern Janus' and
'Into Political
Emergency', London,
Verso, 1981.

23 Roland Barthes, op
cit, p 3.

At the level of theory, the internal contradictions I have sketched above extend in significant part from the influence of Marxism and of Barthes's *Empire of Signs*. In *To the Distant Observer* the Marxist analysis of Japan and its cinema runs into trouble partly because its materialism, *within Burch's limits*, cannot extend to the concept of the cultural Other (Japan); the static, ideal Japan Burch creates is at odds with a materialist analysis. This conflict may be traced, without minimising the probably stronger idealist influence of Barthes, to a traditional weakness of Marxist theory. This weakness is the non-appreciation of national/cultural self-identification as a key focus of organisation against domination by a ruling economic class. The importance of nationalism – and, more loosely and ambiguously, 'cultural identification' – in organising against external ruling classes has been plentifully demonstrated, for example, in Third World independence struggles in this century. This importance remains despite the many instances in which the bourgeoisie has utilised nationalism toward repressive ends – even despite the often tight connection between nationalism and fascism. The troublesome idea of nationalism was debated with great energy among early Marxists[22]; as an agent of positive historical change, it takes a theoretical backseat to class struggle. The relationship between class and nationalist struggle is, of course, still a subject of debate. This Marxist inheritance may account in part for Burch's abandonment of materialist, historically oriented analysis when he reaches the level of cultural wholes – that is, his leaving Japanese phenomena in favour of the Japanese essence, unchanged, in his formulation, since Heian times.

A second theoretical impetus toward idealism is provided by Barthes's *Empire of Signs*. In his formulation of Japan, considerably simpler than Burch's, Barthes chooses to leave aside the 'vast regions of darkness (capitalist Japan, American acculturation, technological development)'[23] that might obscure his vision of the Pure Land. This admired 'radically theoretical stance', as can be seen in the discussion above, is of recurrent influence in *To the Distant Observer*.

In the combination of theoretical influences and ideological goals a country called Japan is formed. Burch's construction of the Japanese counter-text requires a Japan that is a coherent and undefiled system, one that is, not at all coincidentally, located *in the past*. In a new guise, we are confronted again with that pure land of the Western imagination – the East. What is the result of such an approach? The key casualty of this strategy is the role of Japan in the present and the future. This is of course paradoxical, since Burch is arguing 'for Japan', and for its value as a counter-argument or counter-text to the dominant capitalist West. But an ideology dependent on a pure and rigorous cultural Other contains the seeds of its own failure, and betrays its best intentions – not, perhaps, in the specifics of analysis, but in the notion of history and cultural interplay that is engendered. That notion, curiously moralistic, posits a pre-bourgeois state of innocence and cultural coherence. This is the realm of authenticity, before the fragmentation of modernism – the time of Barthes's longed-for Empire, free from the 'incoercible babble' of signification – that is, a time when there was still a possibility of a

seemingly unmediated self. This particular Golden Age turns out to be a gilded trap, at least in terms of Japan's future role as a non-Western culture in the world order. Burch refers to the pre-modern period in Japan, the pure source of its essence, as Primitive ... and at several points draws parallels between it and eighteenth-century Europe, an unfortunately backward and romantic, though not unprecedented, longing for a Marxist critic. This in turn points to the key result of Burch's Japan: that the historical momentum is ultimately conceded to the West, even in the act of opposing it. This approach finally works against the desirable possibility of a truly co-equal cosmopolitanism. It drains energy away from the effort toward the active cultural interplay that is needed to effect global social change – and to bring about a true break with the dominant mode of representation, since that mode determines not only the representation of 'things as they are', but also, perhaps more importantly, the representation of the future.

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THE CINEMA AFTER BABEL: LANGUAGE, DIFFERENCE, POWER

BY ELLA SHOCHAT AND ROBERT STAM

THE REALITY OF language difference, the world-wide babble of mutually incomprehensible tongues and idioms, entails consequences for the cinema which have yet to be explored. While contemporary theoretical work has concerned itself with film *as* language, little attention has been directed to the role of language and language difference *within* film. Working out of the tradition of Saussure-derived linguistics, cine-semioticians have examined the analogies and disanalogies between 'natural language' and film as a discursive practice, but they have not delineated the impact on the cinema of the prodigality of tongues in which it is produced, spoken and received. Our purpose here will be to explore, in a necessarily speculative fashion, the myriad ways in which the sheer fact of linguistic diversity impinges on film as a signifying practice and on the cinema as an 'encratic' institution deeply embedded in multiform relations of power.

By language, we refer, first of all, to the clearly distinct idioms – English, French, Russian, Arabic – recognised as linguistic unities by grammars and lexicons. We refer as well, however, to the multiple 'languages' inhabiting a single culture or a single speech-community, at least in so far as these intra-linguistic differences bear on questions of inter-cultural film reception. Here we follow the thought of Mikhail Bakhtin, for whom the 'crude' boundaries separating natural languages ('polyglossia') represent only one extreme on a continuum. For Bakhtin, every apparently unified linguistic community is also characterised by 'heteroglossia', or 'many-languagedness', in which the idioms of different generations, classes, races, genders and locales compete for ascendancy. For Bakhtin, language is the arena for the clash of differently oriented social accents; each word is subject to conflicting pronunciations, intonations and allusions. Every language is a set of languages, and every speaking subject opens onto a multiplicity of languages. All communication entails an apprenticeship in the language of the other, a kind of translation or coming to terms with meaning on the boundaries of one's own set of languages and those of another. Thus inter-linguistic translation has as its counterpart the *intra*-linguistic 'translation' required for dialogue between diverse individuals and between diverse communities.[1]

Contemporary thought has been haunted by the idea of language. Cen-

[1] For Bakhtin's ideas concerning language, see *Problems of Dostoevski's Poetics*, Ann Arbor, Ardis, 1973; *Rabelais and His World*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1968; and *The Dialogic Imagination*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1981. See also V N Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, New York, Seminar Press, 1973. The authorship of this last is disputed; there is considerable evidence that Bakhtin wrote substantial portions or at least worked in extremely close collaboration with Volosinov. See also the 'Forum on Mikhail Bakhtin', a special issue of *Critical Inquiry* (vol 10 no 2, December 1983) devoted to Bakhtin, as well as the *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa/ University of Ottawa Review*, vol 53 no 1, January/March 1983.

tral to the project of thinkers as diverse as Russell, Wittgenstein, Cassirer, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and even Derrida, is the idea that language so completely structures our grasp of the world that 'reality' can be seen as an effect of linguistic convention. According to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, language *is* culture, and those who 'inhabit' different languages might be said to inhabit different worlds. The grammatical and semantic fields of a language, indeed its entire conceptual framework, install speakers in habitual grooves of perception and expression which predispose them to experience the world in culturally specific ways. This linguistic 'relativity principle' has as its corollary the view of all languages as fundamentally equal. For contemporary linguistics, languages do not exist in a hierarchy of value. The notion of 'primitive' languages, rooted in the evolutionary assumption that the complex develops from the simple, here lacks pertinence since every language is perfectly suited to the cultural needs and cultural reality of its speakers.

But if all languages are created equal, some are made 'more equal than others'. Inscribed within the play of power, languages are caught up in artificial hierarchies rooted in cultural hegemonies and political oppression. English, for example, as a function of its colonising status, became the linguistic vehicle for the projection of Anglo-American power, technology and finance. Hollywood, especially, came to incarnate a linguistic hubris bred of empire. Presuming to speak for others in *its* native idiom, Hollywood proposed to tell the story of other nations not only to Americans, but also for the other nations themselves, and always in English. In Cecil B De Mille epics, both the ancient Egyptians and the Israelites spoke English, and so, for that matter, did God. In Hollywood, the Greeks of *The Odyssey*, the Romans of *Ben Hur*, Cleopatra of Egypt, Madame Bovary of France, Count Vronsky of Russia, Helen of Troy and Jesus of Nazareth all had as their *lingua franca* the English of Southern California. Hollywood both profited from and itself promoted the universalisation of the English language as *the* idiom of speaking subjects, thus contributing indirectly to the subtle erosion of the linguistic autonomy of other cultures. By virtue of its global diffusion, Hollywood became an agent in the dissemination of Anglo-American cultural hegemony.[2]

Theoretical Preamble: Language in the Cinema

Before exploring the question of language difference and power, we must first examine the theoretical basis of our discussion. That we can consider the role of language difference in film at all is made possible by the fact that language itself variably penetrates the diverse 'tracks' of the cinema. At what points, then, does language, and therefore language difference, 'enter' the cinema? Metz in *Language and Cinema* stresses the linguistic character of two of the five tracks – recorded phonetic sound and writing in the image.[3] (These two, we might add, can exchange places, with written material substituting for phonetic dialogue, as in the celebrated 'dialogue of the book covers' in Godard's *Une Femme est une*

[2] One might easily posit an analogy here between English as *the* international language, and dominant cinema as *the* film language, with alternative idioms being reduced to the status of 'dialects'.

[3] See Christian Metz, *Language and Cinema*, The Hague, Mouton, 1974. One element not emphasised by Metz is the interarticulation of written materials in the image with the specifically cinematic codes. The diverse directionality of the scripts of different languages – the fact that Hebrew and Arabic are read 'horizontally' from right to left, for example, or that Chinese is read in vertical columns – can inflect camera movements over script. Wayne Wang's *Chan is Missing* (1982), for example, repeatedly pans down vertically over Chinese written materials.

Femme). Language, at least potentially, however, pervades *all* the filmic tracks. The music and noise tracks, for example, can embrace linguistic elements. Recorded music is often accompanied by lyrics, and even when not so accompanied, can evoke lyrics. The purely instrumental version of 'Melancholy Baby' in Lang's *Scarlet Street* (1945) elicits in the spectator the mental presence of the words of that song. Kubrick in *Doctor Strangelove* (1964) exploits this evocation of remembered lyrics to ironic effect when he superimposes the well-known melody of 'Try a Little Tenderness' on images of nuclear bombers. Even apart from lyrics, the allegedly abstract art of music is permeated with semantic values. Musicologist J J Nattiez, for example, sees music as deeply embedded in social discourses, including verbal discourses.[4] Nor are recorded noises necessarily 'innocent' of language. Setting aside the question of the cultural relativity of the boundaries separating noise from music from language – one culture's 'noise' may be another culture's 'language', as in the case of African talking drums – we discover the frequent imbrication of noise and language in countless films. The stylised murmur of conversing voices in classical Hollywood restaurant sequences renders human speech as background noise, while Jacques Tati films give voice to an international esperanto of aural effects – vacuum cleaners that wheeze and vinyl seats that go 'pooof' – characteristic of the post-modernist environment.

But the linguistic presence cannot be confined to the soundtrack or to written materials within the image: the image track itself is infiltrated by the ubiquitous agency of language. This infiltration of the iconic by the symbolic, to borrow Peircean terminology, takes many forms, ranging from the perceptual-lexical to the more diffusely anthropological. Perception itself is oriented by the linguistic. The codes of iconic recognition and designation, as Metz points out in 'The Perceived and the Named', structure the very vision of the spectator who thus brings language, as it were, to the image.[5] So tyrannical is the hold of linguistic form on our visual orientation that we perceive even lines and shapes as

[4] See J J Nattiez, *Fondements d'une sémiologie de la musique*, Paris, Union Générale d'Editions, 1975.

[5] See 'Le perçu et le nommé', first published in *Pour une esthétique sans entrave* – Mélanges Mikel Dufrenne, Paris, Editions 10/18, 1975 and reprinted in *Essais Sémiotiques*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1977. The concluding section of the essay is translated as 'Aural Objects', in *Yale French Studies* no 60, 1980, a special issue entitled *Cinema/Sound*.

The 'dialogue of the book covers' in *Une Femme est une Femme*.

38

6 See Boris
Eikhenbaum,
'Problems of Film
Stylistics', in *Screen*,
Autumn 1974, vol 15
no 3, pp 7-32.

7 See Stephen Heath,
'Language, Sight and
Sound', in Stephen
Heath and Patricia
Mellencamp (eds),
Cinema and Language,
Frederick, Md,
University
Publications of
America, 1983.

8 A number of critics
have commented on
the patterned doubling
of this opening
sequence. See, for
example, Ronald
Christ, 'Strangers on a
Train: The Pattern of
Encounter', in Albert J
LaValley (ed), *Focus on
Hitchcock*, Englewood
Cliffs, Prentice-Hall,
1972.

9 Hitchcock further
develops the trope of
the 'birds' eye view' in
The Birds, this time in
both aural and visual
terms. For more on
verbally informed
structures in both
Hitchcock and
Buñuel, see Robert
Stam, 'Hitchcock and
Buñuel: Desire and
the Law', *Studies in the
Literary Imagination*
Fall 1983.

'straight' or 'curved' or 'zigzag' according to the classificatory suggestiveness of the linguistic terms themselves. Our language provides us with orienting metaphors having to do with the conceptualisation of space (having power is to be 'at the top') and the spatialisation of emotion (happy is 'up'). Verbal discourse structures the very formation of images. Boris Eikhenbaum, viewing film metaphor as parasitic on verbal metaphor, speaks of image translations of linguistic tropes.[6] Spectators understand visual metaphors only when a corresponding metaphoric expression exists in their own language; otherwise, the metaphor goes unperceived. In a still broader sense, the anthropological figures generated by a language or culture, such as the structural metaphor linking light and intelligence in classical Greek, or the association of darkness with obscurity and the sinister (as in Freud's 'dark continent of female sexuality', with its suggestive linking of Africa and Woman) shape our vision and thinking in ways yet to be charted.

The verbal-visual nexus has suggestive ramifications for film practice. Camera angles can literalise specific locutions such as 'look up to' or 'oversee' or 'look down on'. In such 'literalisms', as Stephen Heath points out, the visual impact derives from strict fidelity to a linguistic metaphor.[7] Vandamm's coded threat to Eve Kendall in *North by Northwest* (1959) – 'This matter is best disposed of from a great height' – is literalised by Hitchcock's abrupt self-referential shift to a high angle. Hitchcock's films, in fact, constantly highlight the interface of word and image. At times, whole sequences and even entire films are structured by linguistic formulations. *The Wrong Man* (1957) is informed in its entirety by the quibbling sentence: 'Manny plays the bass'. He plays the bass, quite literally, in the Stork Club, but he also plays the role of the *base* when he is falsely accused and forced to mimic the actions of the real thief. The overture sequence of *Strangers on a Train* (1951), similarly, orchestrates an elaborate verbal and visual play on the expressions 'crisscross' and 'double-cross' (crossed railroad tracks, crossed legs, crossed tennis raquets, tennis doubles, double scotches, alternating montage as double, lap-dissolve as a 'criss-cross' of images and so forth).[8] Hitchcock's cameo appearance, significantly, shows him carrying a double bass, in a film featuring two *doppelgänger* characters, each, in his way, 'base'. At times, the interplay of verbal-visual puns and equivalences becomes at once subliminal and pervasive. The first post-credit shots of *Psycho*, for example, subtly prefigure that film's obsession with avian imagery by literalising the notion of a 'bird's eye view' of a city appropriately named Phoenix, while the air-borne crane shots visually mimic the soaring movements of a bird through the air.[9]

At times, language enters the cinematic experience in ways only obliquely related to the five tracks of the film text. Within the apparatus itself, in certain locales and at certain historical moments, intermediary speaking figures have been employed to negotiate, as it were, between text and audience. Noël Burch has emphasised the silent-period Lecturer whose role was to construct continuity and comment on the action and thus orient audience response, and in *To the Distant Observer* he
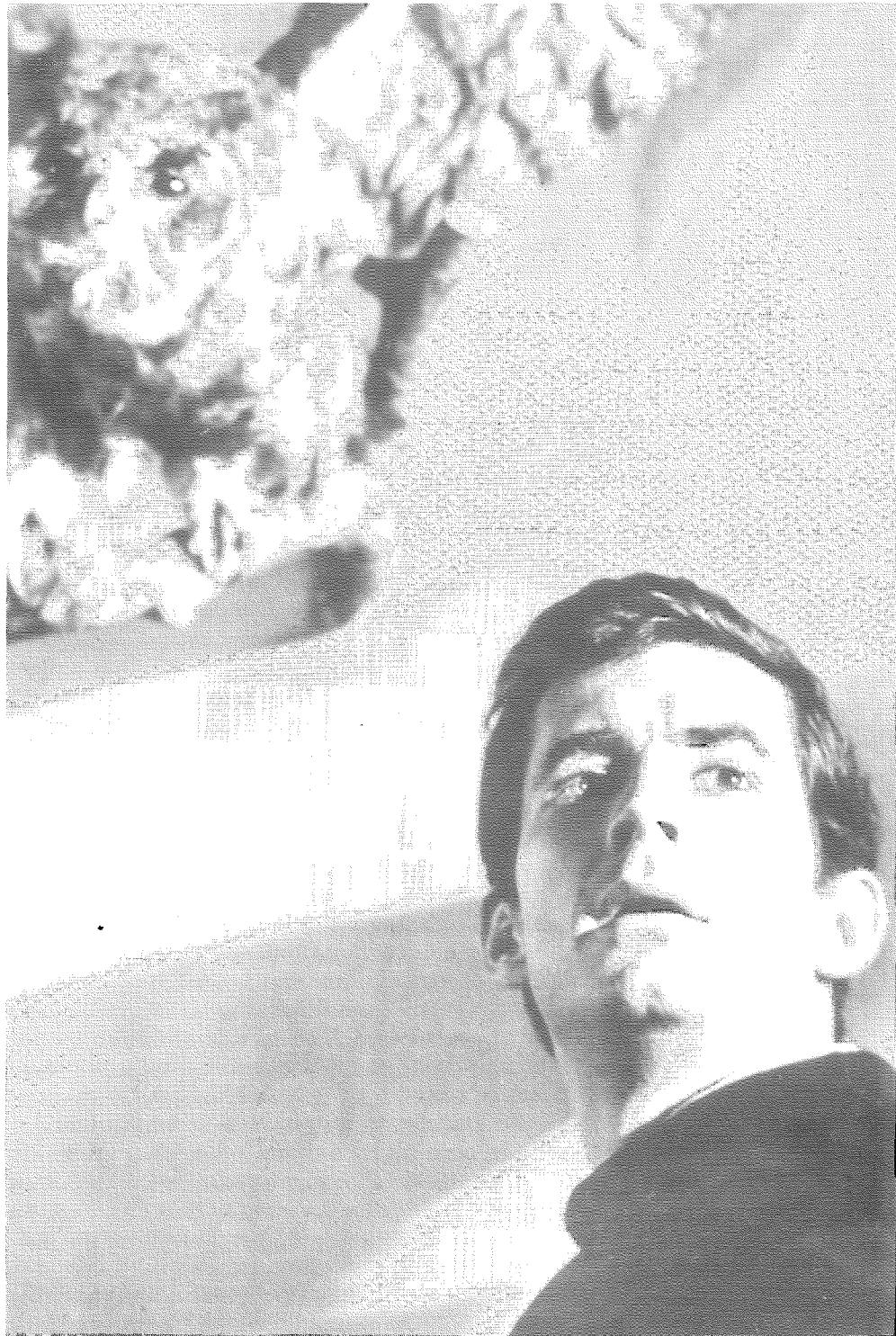
Figures of speech: the 'bird's eye view' in *Psycho*.

10 See Noël Burch, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1979. See also Noël Burch, 'Approaching Japanese Film', in Stephen Heath and Patricia Mellenchamp (eds), *Cinema and Language*, op cit, for some brief speculations on the role of language in constructing what Burch calls the 'profound otherness' of classical Japanese cinema.

11 Some New York theatres have institutionalised silence with pre-feature intertitles: 'Talking during the Projection of the Film Disturbs Others: Please Be Considerate.' (Apparently the cinematic institution has links not only to the theatre and religion, but also to the library.)

12 See Boris Eikhenbaum, op cit.

speaks of the Lecturer's Japanese cousins, the *Benshi* who read and interpreted filmic images for their narrative content, avatars of an institution which persisted into the late 1930s.[10] We might also speak in this context of those films which create a space, as it were, for dialogue with the spectator. Radicalising Bela Balazs' call, in the '30s, for post-screening political discussions, the Argentinian film-makers Solanas and Getino in *La Hora de los Hornos* (*Hour of the Furnaces*, 1968) incorporate into the text programmed interruptions of the projections to allow for debate concerning the central political issues raised by the film. Thus the cinematic apparatus, which generally favours only deferred communication, opens itself up to person-to-person dialogue, in a provocative amalgam of cinema/theatre/political rally. The passive and silent cinematic experience, that *rendezvous manqué* between exhibitionist and voyeur, is transformed into a 'theatrical' and linguistic encounter between human beings present in the flesh.

Along with such programmed linguistic interventions, language enters the cinematic experience in other, more extemporaneous ways. Dialogue, already present in the film, and metaphorically evoked in the 'dialogue' between film and spectator, at times becomes literal through the impromptu verbal participation of the audience. This participation can take a multiplicity of forms. Boisterous talk sometimes disturbs the reverential silence of the art theatres, behaviour that is quickly shushed or reprimanded, as if a religious rite were being desecrated.[11] (The ideal in the cinema, Eikhenbaum points out, is not to sense the presence of the other spectators, but to be alone with the film, to become deaf and dumb to the rest of the world.[12]) In some communities, conventions of spectating are such that the 'naive' audience is encouraged to address verbal warnings or approval to the actors/characters on the screen (the rest of us, Metz suggests, confine such thoughts to the privacy of our minds); thus the collectivity celebrates its own existence. At times, a full-scale dialogue can break out among the spectators themselves in the form of repartee or argument; the film, in such cases, loses its diegetic hold over the audience as the spectacle is displaced from screen to audience, producing a form of distanciation generated not by the text but by its receivers. A similar distanciation takes place when paralinguistic expressions such as feminist hisses question and relativise the macho wisdom of a paternalistic 'hero'. In all these cases, the presence of language within the movie theatre substantially modifies the experience of the film.

This linguistic assertiveness on the part of the audience takes extreme forms within the cult film phenomenon. In the '60s, audiences at Humphrey Bogart retrospectives began to deliver Bogart's lines in unison, verbally reinforcing the text and at times anticipating specific words and gestures (punctuating Bogart's climactic pistol shots in *Key Largo*, for example, with rhythmic chants of 'more! more! more!'). This trend reached its apotheosis with the US cult of the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, in which an audience of repeat-viewers elaborated a dynamically evolving parallel parody text, combining the synched repetition of songs and lines from the film with interpolated phrases which 'play off' and mock the official dialogue, in a kind of subversive pop culture equivalent

to the traditional school memorisation of classical texts.

Even when verbal language is absent from both film and movie theatre, semantic processes take place in the mind of the spectator through what the Russian formalists called 'inner speech'. Inner speech, in this sense, refers to the intra-psychic signification, the pulse of thought which is implicated in language. Film viewing, according to Eikhenbaum, is 'accompanied by a constant process of internal speech', whereby images and sounds are projected onto a kind of verbal screen which functions as a constant ground for meaning.[13] Inner speech, which we address to ourselves, provides the discursive 'glue' between shots and sequences. Our purpose here is not to summarise the theoretical work performed on inner speech by Vygotsky, Voloshinov, Eisenstein, Heath and Willemen[14], but only to speculate on its relevance to the question of language difference in the cinema.

If all film experience involves a kind of translation – from the images and sounds of the text into the internalised discourse of the spectator – inter-lingual cinematic experiences entail specific and more complicated mechanisms. In the case of the subtitled film, we hear the more-or-less alien sounds of another tongue. If the language neighbours our own, we may recognise a substantial proportion of words and phrases. If more distant, we may find ourselves adrift on an alien sea of undecipherable phonic substance. Specific sound combinations might remind us of locutions in our own language, but we cannot be certain they are not phonetic *faux amis*. The intertitles and subtitles of foreign films, meanwhile, trigger a process of what linguists call 'endophony', i.e., the soundless mental enunciation of words, the calling to mind of the phonetic signifier. But the interlingual film experience is perceptually bifurcated: we hear another's language while we read our own. As spectators, we forge a synthetic unity which transcends the heteroglot source material. The processes of hearing and reading, furthermore, are not identical; each sets in motion a distinct form of inner speech. Reading is relatively cerebral, while hearing prompts associative processes more deeply rooted in our psychic past. We must also distinguish between the experience of the silent versus that of the sound film. While the lecturers, choral accompaniments and titles of 'silent' cinema hardly suggest a wordless Bazinian freedom of the imagination, sound dialogue may inflect inner speech in a more overdetermined manner. Theoreticians of the film experience, in any case, have not adequately explored the nuances of the presence of language and language difference, the subtle ways in which an inaudible but nonetheless real aggregate of discursive privacies, the accumulative pressure of inner speech, quietly alters the film experience.

The Vagaries of Translation: Film Titles

We have yet to examine the implications of language *difference* for film. What are the practical, analytical and theoretical consequences of the intersection of film and natural language? The import of such questions becomes evident already with the translator of titles, intertitles and sub-

[13] See ibid, p 14.

[14] See L S Vygotsky, *Thought and Language*, Cambridge, Mass, MIT Press, 1962; S M Eisenstein, *Film Form* , New York, Harcourt Brace & World, 1949; V N Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, New York, Seminar Press, 1973; Stephen Heath, 'Language, Sight and Sound', in *Questions of Cinema*, London, Macmillan, 1980; and Paul Willemen, 'Reflections on Eikhenbaum's Concept of Internal Speech in the Cinema', *Screen*, Winter 1974/75, vol 15 no 4; and 'Notes on Subjectivity', *Screen* vol 19 no 1, Spring 1978, and 'Cinematic Discourse: The Problem of Inner Speech', *Screen* vol 22 no 3, 1981. The notion of inner speech has philosophical antecedents in such thinkers as Herder, Humboldt, Thomas Aquinas and even Plato. See James Stam, *Inquiries into the Origin of Language*, New York, Harper and Row, 1976.

titles. Title translations, for example, often involve serious miscalculations due to haste, laziness or insufficient mastery of source or target language. (While publishers would never engage a hack translator for *A La Recherche du Temps Perdu*, film distributors, perhaps out of vestigial scorn for a low-status medium, regularly engage incompetents.) A Rumanian bureaucrat, for example, misled by the phonetic resemblance between Italian *moderato* and Rumanian *moderat* (quiet, cautious) and between *cantabile* and *comtabil* (bookkeeper, accountant), construed *Moderato Cantabile*, the Peter Brook adaptation of the Duras novel, as *The Quiet Accountant*. But the question of film translation is more complex than such an egregious error would suggest. Perfect translation is in the best of circumstances a virtual impossibility. Languages are not ossified nomenclatures, parallel lexical lists from which one need merely choose matching items on the basis of a one-to-one correspondence. Even an untranslated title can subtly change by virtue of acquiring a new linguistic and cultural environment. Proper names, for example, may shift pronunciation or connotation in a new context. Even a technically correct translation entails subtle modifications. The English *Day for Night* correctly renders the cinematographic procedure known in French as *La Nuit Américaine*, but a nuance is lost with the disappearance of *américaine*, pointing, as it does in the Truffaut film, to the nostalgic memory of the classic Hollywood film.

A truly perfect translation, George Steiner points out, would offer an interpretation so exhaustive as to leave no single unit in the source text – phonetic, grammatical, semantic, contextual – out of account, yet at the same time would add nothing in the way of paraphrase or explication.[15] Since interlingual translation merely intensifies the usual slippages and detours of all communication, since all language is caught up in the unending spiral of *différance*, and since all discourse is intensely conventionalised and embedded in cultural particularity, no absolute transparency is possible; there remains always a core of mutual incommensurability. Our emphasis here will not be on the 'loss' of an original purity – a notion traceable to the traditional belief that no sacred text or divine expression can be transcribed without forfeit – but rather on a dynamic process of cultural recoding, a change in the form of linguistic energy rather than a fall from Edenic purity.

The translator wishing to be 'faithful' to an original film title is confronted with myriad choices. To what, first of all, is one to be faithful – to the literal denotation, to the attendant connotations, or to the tone and stylistic form? Since each word exists at the crossroads of multiple semes, any translation arrests in a knot a process of infinite association, of constantly shifting undertones and overtones. Puns and wordplay, in this sense, constitute a paradigmatic instance of the challenges posed by verbal polysemy. The 'pieces' in the film *Five Easy Pieces*, for example, are at once musical, filmic and sexual. Another language is hardly likely to feature the same relation between the phonemic and the semantic (what linguists call paranomasia) and thus be able to orchestrate the same constellation of meanings. The Hebrew rendering *Resisei Hachaim* ('Shards of Life'), for example, diminishes the rich resonances of the

[15] See George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1975.

English title. The 'wave' in Michael Snow's *Wavelength*, similarly, condenses multiple significations – sea waves, sine-waves, sound-waves, new wave – and anticipates the film's structuring play on 'sea' and 'see', all of which would be virtually impossible to convey in another language. Given the challenge of an unattainable adequation, the translator, in 'principled despair', must settle for a semantic and affective approximation.

The title, as that sequence of signs which circulates in the world in the form of advertisement or announcement prior even to the film's screening, constitutes an especially privileged locus in the discursive chain of film. As hermeneutic pointers, titles promise, prefigure, orient. Titles are generally assumed to bear an indexical relation to the signified of the narrative events. Even when they are reflexive – *A Movie* – or perversely non-indexical – *Un Chien Andalou* – titles still point to some feature of the text in question. When original titles seem insufficiently indexical, translators are sometimes tempted to 'improve' them. But if a change is to be made, which narrative events should be evoked and in what manner? Since titles posit enigmas and nudge the audience in the direction of a specific reading, to change the title is to change, however subtly, the reading. The Brazilian rendering of Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) as *Um Corpo Que Cai* ('A Body that Falls') provides a teasing clue, not present in the original, and anticipates events that occur far into the narrative. Some translations virtually destroy the hermeneutic mechanism at the centre of the film's diegesis. The shock of the climatic revelation of *Psycho* (1960), for example, is severely compromised when it is entitled, as it was in Portugal, *O Homen Que Era Mãe* ('The Man Who Was His Mother').

Even the flagrant ineptitude of this last example would still not authorise us to posit a norm of total adequacy in translation. First, we naively assume that the original title is somehow 'correct', involving a motivated, necessary and natural relation between signifier and signified. But the original title as well might have been different; *Un Chien Andalou*, we now know, almost became *It is Dangerous to Lean Inside*, and *L'Age d'Or* was almost entitled *The Icy Waters of Selfish Calculation*. Every title represents an arbitrary freezing of a Heraclitean swirl of possibilities. There can be no unproblematic return to origins; the process of translation simply reopens a question arbitrarily foreclosed at an earlier point. Given this arbitrariness, some translators, not surprisingly, take liberties with the original by making strong gestures of interpretation.[16] Three distinct renderings of Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* (1977) show the nature of this process. The German rendering as *Der Stadt Neurotiker* ('The City Neurotic') operates at least two transformations; it elides the feminine proper name in favour of a presumably masculine functional substantive, and it implies a causal relation between the city and the protagonist's neurosis. The Brazilian *Noivo Neurotico, Noiva Nervosa* ('Neurotic Boyfriend, Nervous Girlfriend') also elides the feminine proper name, this time in favour of quadruple alliteration and a farcically judgemental title strongly reminiscent of the Italian erotic comedies then popular in Brazil. The Israeli *Haroman Sheli im Annie* ('My

[16] Godard's descriptive *A Bout de Souffle* (*Breathless*) became in Japanese an imperative exhortation (perhaps reflecting a distant observer's caricatural view of French existentialism): *Katte ni Shiyagare* ('Do Whatever you Like!')

Romance with Annie'), finally, retains mention of Annie but specifies genre – romance – while shifting focalisation to the male hero, seen as author of the romance and titular proprietor of the female protagonist.

Discourse is always shaped by an audience, by what Todorov calls the *allocutaire* – those to whom the discourse is addressed – whose potential reaction must be taken into account. A film title is one turn taken in a kind of dialogue, forming part of an ongoing interlocution between film and spectator. Torn from its normal linguistic environment, the title in translation enters an alien field of what Bakhtin calls 'prior speakings'. The English phrase 'horse's mouth', for example, enters a paradigm of proverbial expressions such as 'straight from the horse's mouth' and 'don't look a gift horse in the mouth', a fact lost on the Polish translator who literally construed the Ronald Neam film *The Horse's Mouth* (1958) as *Konsky Pysk* ('Mouth of the Horse'). Since the figurative expression 'straight from the horse's mouth' does not exist in Polish, the title became inadvertently non-indexical and surrealist, leading frustrated viewers to expect a horse that never materialises. Commercial considerations, meanwhile, lead to 'parasitical' translations which strive to exploit a previous film's box-office success. Israeli distributors, hoping to capitalise on the success of Mel Brooks' *Blazing Saddles* (1974), rereleased Brooks' earlier *Twelve Chairs* as *Kis'ot Lohatim* ('Blazing Chairs'). The commercial intertext also motivates the gratuitous eroticisation of titles. In a particularly grotesque example, Bergman's *Persona* became in Brazil *Quando as Mulheres Pecam* ('When Women Sin'); thus the rich resonances of the original title – at once psychoanalytic, theatrical and philosophical – yield to the calculated sexism of a title whose puritanical lasciviousness led local spectators to expect a film in the tradition of the Brazilian *pornochanchadas*.

The heavy or tragic tonalities of an original title at times modulate in translation into a more cheerful or even comic mode. The explosively oxymoronic title, linking love and death, of Resnais' *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, is defused, ironically, in Japan, the scene of the original necropolis, to become a subdued *Nijūyokikan no jōji* ('Twenty-Four Hour Affair'). Murnau's *Der Letzte Mann* ('The Last Man', 1924), by a similar process, becomes in English *The Last Laugh*, thus deflecting attention away from the tragic thrust of the core story to the comic resolution of the happy end. In the case of New German cinema, titles have undergone analogous metamorphoses: Margaretta von Trotta's *Der Blierne Jahren* ('The Leaden Years') becomes a more innocuous *Marianne and Julianne*, suggesting a tale of female friendship, in which the assonance of the two names performs a variation on the alliteration of *Jules and Jim*. The rendering of Wim Wenders' *Im Lauf der Zeit* ('In the Course of Time'), with its philosophical and cinematic resonances, as a playful *Kings of the Road*, with its echo of the Roger Miller song, similarly, turns it into just another road movie. In such cases, the reflective *angst* associated with many New German films, seen by the film-makers themselves as part of a political duty to keep the spirit of negation alive in the post-Nazi years, has been kidnapped by an alien optimism.

At times the political and ideological subtext of such connotative shifts is closer to the surface. Krysztof Kieslowski's *Amator* ('Amateur'), a reflexive film about a Polish worker-cinéaste, was rendered in English as *Camera Buff*, which highlights the protagonist's fascination with film-making but elides another connotation operative in the Polish title, namely that the hero's amateurism is not only cinematic but also political, whence his difficulties with the authorities who quietly scuttle his career. Many translated titles perform this kind of subtle depoliticisation. The English rendering of *Salvatore Giuliano* as *Bandit's Revenge* transforms a highly politicised film into what sounds like a revenge western. (The Japanese rendering as *Shishirino Kusoi Kuri* – 'Black Fog in Sicily' – in contrast, politicises the title since 'black fog' in Japanese can connote governmental corruption.) Ousmane Sembène's *La Noire de...* ('The Black Woman From...'), rendered as *Black Girl*, sheds both the ambiguity of *noire* as 'woman/girl' and the ellipsis implying that the protagonist might have come from any number of African countries. Buñuel's titles have especially suffered from a process of sentimentalisation and depoliticisation. The masculine subject pronoun of *El* ('He', 1952) suggests a broad critique of patriarchy. Translated as *This Strange Passion*, it emphasises the schizophrenic comportment of a pathologically jealous madman, rather than the 'normal' pathology of *machismo*. *Los Olvidados* ('The Forgotten Ones', 1950), similarly, became in English the more melodramatically enticing *The Young and the Damned*. While the original title implicitly indicts the bourgeois audience – it is they who have forgotten the slum-dwellers – the English title promises a kind of lurid youth picture offering more conventional satisfactions for the spectator. In French, *Los Olvidados* became a lachrymose *Pitié pour Eux* ('Pity for Them'), exemplifying exactly the kind of condescending charity excoriated by the film.

Sound and Language Difference: Subtitles

The challenge of translation took on special complexity with the advent of sound. Major film industries experimented with diverse approaches; initially, dubbing, subtitles and native-language translators were tried. In 1929, MGM embarked on an expensive programme to replicate all its feature films in three different linguistic versions and in 1930, Paramount established a studio near Paris to create foreign films in five languages. The British, French and German industries, meanwhile, followed Hollywood's lead in multiple versions, albeit on a smaller scale.[17] In Czechoslovakia, Josef Slechta invented a 'sound camera' which sharply reduced dependence on German and American sound equipment. Eastern European audiences flocked to the movie theatres to hear local stars speak and sing in their native language. In Latin America, similarly, local industries were encouraged by the arrival of sound. Hoping to break North American domination of their markets, film-makers developed the popular carnival-based *chanchada* in Brazil and the tango

[17] For a discussion of the transition to sound in Europe, see Douglas Gomery, 'Economic Struggle and Hollywood Imperialism; Europe Converts to Sound', *Yale French Studies* (*Cinema/Sound*) no 60, 1980.

film in Argentina, while Mexico competed with Argentina in supplying Latin America with Spanish-speaking films. Despite earlier European resistance to Hollywood domination, it was only with the coming of sound, ironically, that many Latin American film critics and spectators began to complain about the 'foreignness' of North American films. Silence had had the effect of masking the national origins of the films. Thanks to the 'visual esperanto' of silent film, which includes many cross-cultural codes, spectators not only read the intertitles in their own language but also imagined dialogue in their own language. Cinema was retroactively perceived as foreign and colonialist, precisely because other-languaged dialogue destroyed the masking effect of silence.[18]

With sound, the transition from an imagined universality into nationality and language difference modified the relationship between spectator and film. Despite the sensation of plenitude engendered by the addition of sound, the change also brought certain psychic losses. With silent cinema, the desiring spectators dreamed, as it were, phantasmatic voices to match the faces of their favourite stars. With sound, spectators were obliged to confront particular voices speaking particular languages not necessarily identifiable with their own. Greta Garbo, it turned out, had an 'attractive' Swedish accent but John Gilbert's voice was 'reedy' and 'unpleasant'. 'Charlot' wasn't French after all – although of course French spectators *knew* Charlie Chaplin was Anglo-American; we speak here of the psychic regime of *'je sais, mais quand-même'*. The effect of loss was analogous, in some respects, to that experienced by lovers of a novel when dreamed characters are incarnated in a film by specific actors with specific voices and physiognomies. At the same time, silent cinema was retroactively perceived as mute or silent, its 'lack' revealed by the encroaching presence of sound. Silent film intertitles, Mary Ann Doane has pointed out, had the effect of separating an actor's speech from the image of his/her body.[19] The terms proposed to designate the redefined cinematic entity, not surprisingly, celebrate the reuniting of voice and body by emphasising the dialogue track: 'the talkies', *le cinéma parlant*, *cinema falado* ('spoken cinema', in Portuguese). Other designations, less vococentric, were more inclusive in their perception of the role of sound: 'sound cinema', *cinéma sonore*, and perhaps the most adequate to a medium of images and sounds: the Hebrew *kolnoa* (sound-voice/movement).

Once it became obvious that the production of multiple foreign-language versions of films was not a viable option, producers, distributors and exhibitors were left with the fundamental choice of either subtitles (dominant in such countries as France and the United States) or post-synchronisation (the standard practice in Italy and Germany). In the case of subtitles, all the processes characteristic of title translation – filtration of meaning through ideological and cultural grids, the mediation of a social superego – operate with equal force. For those familiar with both source and target language, subtitles offer the pretext for a linguistic game of 'spot the error'.[20] There would be little point in cataloguing such errors; our intention is only to plot the trajectory of their slippage,

[18] For more discussion on Brazilian critics' response to sound, see Ismail Xavier, *Sétima Arte: Um Culto Moderno*, Sao Paulo, Editora Perspectiva, 1978. Also see Jean-Claude Bernardet and Maria Rita Galvao, *O Nacional e o Popular na Cultura Brasileira*, Sao Paulo, Brasiliense /Embrafilme, 1983, pp 230-31.

[19] See Mary Ann Doane, 'The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space', in *Yale French Studies (Cinema/Sound)*, no 60, 1980.

[20] Multi-lingual films such as *Le Mépris (Contempt*, 1963) require some subtitles *wherever* they are screened. In *Contempt*, they form an integral part of the signification of a film deeply concerned with diverse 'translations' within the polyglot atmosphere of international co-productions. Italian postsynchronisation eliminated the role of the interpreter, leading Godard to dissociate himself from the Italian version of the film.

the direction of their drift. That the English version of Godard's *Masculin, Féminin* (1965) translates *brûler à napalm* ('burning with napalm') as 'burning Nepal' is not, finally, crucial. More significant is the tendency, with New Wave films, to bowdlerise the French dialogue. (Censorship, for Freud, we are reminded, was a kind of 'translation'.) The English subtitles of *Breathless*, for example, consistently play down the aggressive *grossièreté* of the original. Belmondo's opening *'Je suis con'* becomes an inoffensive 'I'm stupid', and his *'Va te faire foutre!'* addressed directly to the camera/audience, is rendered by a desexualised 'Go hang yourself'.[21] The tendency to shy away from sexually connoted words reflects, perhaps, a higher coefficient of puritanism within a society, or at least among its translators. Repressive regimes, meanwhile, have exploited subtitling and dubbing as a mechanism for censorship. To avoid any hint of adultery between Ava Gardner and Clark Gable in *Mogambo*, the censor-translators of Franco's Spain reportedly transformed the pair into brother and sister, thus arousing audiences with the even spicier theme of incest.[22]

Some films are striking in their *omission* of subtitles. Film translators tend to be vococentric, concentrating on spoken dialogue while ignoring other linguistic messages such as background conversation, radio announcements and television commercials, not to mention written materials such as posters, marquees, billboards and newspapers. Thus the spectator unfamiliar with the source language misses certain ironies and nuances.[23] The non-French speaker, for example, misses the play between text and image generated by the written materials pervading *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* (*Two or Three Things I Know about Her*, 1966), a film which might be seen as a gloss on Barthes' dictum that 'we are still, more than ever, a civilization of writing'.[24] The omission of non-vocal linguistic messages can also compromise a film's political tendency, since it is often precisely through such messages that a story is socially or historically contexted. Radio allusions to the war in Algeria in Agnès Varda's *Cléo de 5 à 7* (*Cleo from 5 to 7*, 1962), scandalised the

[21] The Brazilian subtitles of Woody Allen's *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Sex*, in anticipation not only of Brazilian censors but also of an audience not always attuned to the cultural ramifications of Jewishness, elided all that was explicitly sexual or specifically Jewish.

[22] See the *New York Times*, Nov 7, 1983.

[23] It should be pointed out that titles can also operate in the opposite direction. Certain English subtitles for Godard's *Sauve Qui Peut (la Vie)* render readable what was barely audible, even for native French speakers, in the original.

[24] See Roland Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the Image', in Roland Barthes, *Image/Music/Text* (ed Stephen Heath), New York, Hill and Wang, 1977.

Text and image interplay: *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle.*

partisans of L'Algérie Française but went untranslated in the English version. At times, the linguistic strategies of a film compromise its political thrust. In Costa-Gavras' *Hanna K* (1983), presumably a pro-Palestinian film, Arabic dialogue is left unsubtitled, while English masquerades as Hebrew, thus affirming an Israel-US cultural link while downplaying any specific Jewish-Israeli identity. Subtitles, finally, can inject revolutionary messages into non-revolutionary films. In the late '60s and '70s, French leftists reportedly 'kidnapped' Kung Fu films, giving them revolutionary titles such as *La Dialectique Peut-Elle Casser les Briques?* ('Can the Dialectic Break Bricks?') and incendiary subtitles. A sequence of devastating karate blows would be subtitled: 'Down with the bourgeoisie!' thus providing a left political 'anchorage' for what were essentially exploitation films.

The linguistic mediation of subtitles dramatically affects the film experience. For audiences in countries where imported films predominate, subtitles are a normal, taken-for-granted part of the film experience. Literalising the semiotic textual metaphor, spectators actually *read* films as much as they see and hear them, and the energy devoted to reading subtitles inevitably detracts from close attention to images and sounds. In many Third World countries, in fact, the penetration of subtitled foreign films has indirectly led to the physical neglect of the sound systems in the theatres, exhibitors being guided by the spurious logic that spectators occupied in reading subtitles will not be overly concerned with the quality of sound.[25] In countries such as India and Israel, the spectator is at times confronted with vertical tiers of multi-lingual subtitles. In cases where the films themselves are multi-lingual, subtitles have an effect of homogenisation for the foreign spectator. The exuberant polyglossia of such films as Moshe Mizrahi's *Habait Berchov Chlush* (*The House on Chloush Street*, 1975), which features Hebrew, Arabic, Yiddish, Ladino, Spanish and Russian, or Youssef Chahine's *Iskinairiyya Leh?* (*Alexandria Why?*, 1979), which deploys the diverse languages spoken in the cosmopolitan Alexandria of the '40s, is 'levelled' by monolingual subtitles when shown abroad.

Sound and Language Difference: Post-Synchronisation

The choice of post-synchronisation as opposed to subtitling has significant consequences. Post-synchronisation, or 'dubbing', can be defined for our purposes as the technical procedure by which a voice, whether of the original performer or another, is 'glued' to a visible speaking figure in the image. With dubbing, the original and adopted texts are homogenous in their material of expression: what was phonetic in the original remains phonetic in the translation, unlike subtitles, where the phonetic original becomes graphological in the translation. With subtitles, the difference in material of expression allows for the juxtaposition of two parallel texts, one aural and the other written, and thus for the possibility of comparison. Errors become potentially 'visible', not only to privileged spectators familiar with the languages in question, but also to the general viewer con-

[25] In Israel, films spoken in Hebrew have at times been subtitled in Hebrew due to lack of confidence in the sound systems of the movie theatres.

scious of small inconsistencies: a disproportion in duration between spoken utterance and written translation, for example, or the failure of subtitles to register obvious linguistic disturbances such as a lisp or a stutter. The single-track nature of dubbing, in contrast, makes comparison impossible. Without the original script or version, there is simply nothing with which to compare the dubbed rendition.[26] Given our desire to believe that the heard voices actually emanate from the actors/characters on the screen, we repress all awareness of the possibility of an incorrect translation; in fact, we forget that there has been any translation at all.

While subtitling resembles a kind of summary prose translation, dubbing is more comparable to the complex juggling of sense, rhythm and technical prosody involved in poetic translation. Subtitles can concentrate meaning, transforming redundant into more efficient language, or, on the other hand, they might (although this possibility is rarely explored) explicate a punning reference or offer contextual footnotes. With dubbing, in contrast, each visible sign of speech activity must be somehow rendered; words or sounds must be fitted to the moving mouth. Dubbing, in this sense, poses immense *technical* as well as *linguistic* challenges. Interlingual dubbing substitutes a separate and new sound recording in a second language for the original text. The newly recorded dialogue, separated out from the noise and music tracks, must be carefully matched with the articulatory movements and the audible speech results in what Ist007 articulatory movements and the audible speech results in what Istvan Fodor calls, on the analogy of 'phoneme' and 'morpheme', a 'dischroneme', i.e., the minimal unit of non-coincidence of speech and movement, in contrast with the 'synchroneme' or successful matching of dubbed voice and articulatory movement.[27] This matching is diversely articulated with specific cinematic codes such as angle, scale, lighting and so forth, with exigencies' varying according to whether a shot is close-up or *plan américain*, profile or frontal, well or dimly lit. Direct address at close camera range—the extreme close-up of Kane's 'Rosebud' or the disembodied lips mouthing the lyrics of the initial song in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*—poses the greatest challenge because it amplifies attention to speech movement. A long or darkly-lit shot, meanwhile, can blur the distinctive visual features of speech production, and the noise and music tracks can divert attention from the speech organs. Even screen format affects our experience of synchronous matching; wide-screen splays out the speech organs and thus poses more difficult challenges than standard format.

Along with phonetic synchrony, dubbers also strive for what Fodor calls 'character synchrony', that is, the skilful match between the timbre, volume, tempo and style of the speech of the acoustic personifier (the dubber) and the physical gestures and facial expressions of the screen actor. As with any translation, the rendering can never be fully 'faithful'; the chameleonism of dubbing is always partial. While words are socially shared and therefore more-or-less translatable, voices are as irreducibly individual as fingerprints. The same word pronounced by a Marlene Dietrich, a Woody Allen or an Orson Welles is in a sense no longer the

26 A partial exception to this rule occurs in the case of that hybrid form, common in documentaries and in newscasts, which combines the dubbed voice of a translator simultaneously with the original voices, at low volume, in the background.

27 See István Fodor, *Film Dubbing: Phonetic, Semiotic, Esthetic and Psychological Aspects*, Hamburg, Buske Verlag, 1976. Fodor's book is thorough and useful, but limited by an underlying assumption of the ultimate possibility of a virtually total adequation between original and dubbed version. The book also limits itself to European languages.

same word; each voice imprints a special resonance and colouring. The practice of dubbing can lead to a number of anomalous situations. When the target audience is aware, from other films, of the voice and acting style of a given player, the dubbed voice is often an irritant. Those familiar with Jean-Pierre Léaud, for example, are likely to be annoyed by the dubbed English version of Truffaut's *Day for Night*. The memory of the 'real' voice provokes a kind of resistance to the substitute. In international co-productions, meanwhile, a multi-lingual player might dub him/herself into a second or even a third language for foreign versions; so that each linguistic situation results in a new dubbing configuration. At times, the dubbers themselves achieve a certain status and notoriety. In the '30s in Germany, according to Jay Leyda, dubbers earned salaries in proportion to the stars they were dubbing (since audiences insisted on hearing the same voice), resulting in a kind of parasitic star system. In India, meanwhile, stardom is 'bifurcated', as imaged stars share popularity with the unseen 'playback singers' whose voices they borrow.

The Italian situation as regards dubbing calls for special comment. Post-synchronisation has been a feature of Italian cinema since fascism, but forms part of a process of cultural levelling which dates back to the unification of Italy. Since most Italian actors speak 'dialect' rather than the 'official' Tuscan, they are made to speak an artificial language uttered in studios by a specialised corps of dubbers. While well-known actors (Gassman, Mastroianni, Vitti) dub themselves, many lesser-known actors have never been heard in their own voice. The dubbing of foreign films, meanwhile, results in Italians seeing bastardised versions in which cultural specificities are flattened. Within the specialised linguistic code developed for translating the Western, for example, as Geoffrey Nowell-Smith points out, the Union and the Confederacy are rendered as '*nordista*' and '*sudista*', geographical terms with precise connotations in Italy (evoking the tension between 'feudal' South and developing capitalist North), so that the Civil War is read in 'terms of the Risorgimento'. Such abuses led in 1967 to an angry manifesto, signed by Antonioni, Bellocchio, Bertolucci, Pasolini, Rosi and others, denouncing obligatory post-synchronisation: 'Contemporary developments in theoretical studies on the sound film imply the need to take up a position at the outset against the systematic abuse of dubbing, which consistently compromises the expressive values of the film.' Post-synchronisation and the dubbing-translation of foreign films, the authors conclude, 'are the two equally absurd and unacceptable sides of one and the same problem. ....'[28]

Post-synchronisation exploits our naive faith in cinematic reality, our belief that the temporal coincidence of moving lips with phonetic sounds points to a causal and existential connection. Buñuel subverts this faith in *Cet Objet Obscur du Désir* (1977) by having two actresses, dubbed by a third voice, play the same role. Split in the image, the character regains a semblance of unity through the soundtrack. Post-synchronisation also forms part of the film's elaboration of the themes of Frenchness and Spanishness: a film by a Spaniard who has lived in France, adopting a French novel about Spain (*La Femme et le Pantin*) whose Spanish protag-

[28] See Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, 'Italy Sotto Voce', in *Sight and Sound*, vol 37 no 3, Summer 1968, pp 145-147.

onist is transformed by Buñuel into a Frenchman, but played by a Spaniard (Fernando Rey) and dubbed by a well-known French actor (Michel Piccoli). Other film-makers deploy more explicitly disruptive strategies to highlight the factitious nature of post-synchronisation. Godard in *Tout Va Bien* (1972) and Hanoun in *Une Simple Histoire* deliberately misdub in order to sabotage the fictive unity of voice and image. A Brazilian film, significantly entitled *Voz do Brasil* ('Voice of Brazil') after a widely-detested official radio news broadcast, shows an American film being dubbed in a Brazilian sound studio. As the film loop of an emotionally-charged sequence passes on the screen, the dubbing technicians do their work and exchange trivialities. We are struck by the disjunction between the passionate drama on the screen and the apparent boredom in the studio, as well as by the contrast between the glamorous star and the ordinary-looking woman lending her voice. Film dubbers usually remain, to borrow Pierre Schaeffer's term, *acousmatique*, their voices are heard but the real source of the enunciation remains invisible. The provocation of *Voz do Brasil* is to reveal the hidden face of these normally acousmatic dubbers and thus render visible the effaced labour of a particular cinematic process.

The marriage of convenience that weds a voice from one language and culture to an imaged speaker coming from another often triggers a kind of battle of linguistic and cultural codes. Linguistic communication is multi-track; every language carries with it a constellation of corollary features having to do with oral articulation, facial expression and bodily movement. Certain locutions are regularly accompanied, often without the speaker's awareness, by codified gestures and automatic motions. The norms of physical expressiveness, moreover, sharply vary from culture to culture; extroverted peoples accompany their words with a livelier play of gesticulations than more introverted peoples. Michael Anderson's *Around the World in Eighty Days* contrasts the expressive codes of the phlegmatic Englishman Phineas Fogg with those of the

The gesticulating Frenchman and the phlegmatic Englishman in *Around the World in Eighty Days.*

vehemently gesticulating Frenchman Passepartout. In *Trouble in Paradise* (1932), Lubitsch humorously counterpoints the speech manners of southern and northern Europeans. Recounting a robbery to the Italian police, the Edward Everett Horton character speaks in English (posited as putative French) while the Italian interpreter ferries his words over to the police. Horton's speech is unemotional, efficient and gestureless, while the interpreter's is flamboyant and animated with lively facial expressions and emphatic Italianate gestures. In a single long-take, Lubitsch recurrently pans with the shuttling translator, alternately placing with Horton or the police but never *with* the police, thus further underlining the linguistic and cultural gulf between them.

To graft one language, with its own system of linking sound and gesture, onto the visible behaviour associated with another, then, is to foster a kind of cultural violence and dislocation. Relatively slight when the languages and cultures closely neighbour, this dislocation becomes major when they are more distant, resulting in a clash of cultural repertoires. Brazilian television, like many in the Third World, for example, constantly programmes American films and television series in which American media stars speak fluent dubbed Portuguese. The match of the moving mouths of Kojak, Colombo and Starsky and Hutch with the sounds of Brazilian Portuguese, however, results in a kind of monstrosity, a collision between the cultural codes associated with Brazilian Portuguese (strong affectivity, a tendency toward hyperbole, lively gestural accompaniment of spoken discourse) and those associated with police-detective English (minimal affectivity, understatement, controlled gestures, a cool, hard, tough demeanour). A Brazilian avant-garde film, Wilson Coutinho's *Cildo Meireles* (1981), exploits this gap to satiric effect by matching the image of John Wayne on horseback to incongruous discourse in Portuguese. Wayne's moving lips, in this case, are made to articulate contemporary theories of *différance* and deconstruction. When his antagonists resist his intellectual claims, our hero guns the heretics down.

Language and Power

Although languages as abstract entities do not exist in hierarchies of value, languages as lived operate within hierarchies of power. Language and power intersect not only in obvious conflicts concerning official tongues, but wherever the question of language difference becomes involved with asymmetrical political arrangements. As a potent symbol of collective identity, language is the focus of fierce loyalties existing at the razor edge of national difference. In South Africa, blacks protest the imposition of Afrikaans as the official language of education; in the United States, hispanics struggle for bilingual education and examinations. What are the implications of this language/power intersection for the cinema? What is the linguistic dimension of an emerging cinema within a situation of 'unstable bilingualism' such as that of Quebec? How many of the estimated five thousand languages currently in use are

actually spoken in the cinema? Are there major languages completely lacking in cinematic representation? How many appear briefly in an ethnographic film and as quickly disappear? How many films are never subtitled due to insufficient funds and therefore never distributed internationally? What about anti-colonialist films (Pontecorvo's *Burn*) artificially made to speak a hegemonic language to guarantee geographic distribution and economic survival?

The penetration of a hegemonic language often helps clear the path for cinematic domination. In the aftermath of World War II, English became what George Steiner has called the 'vulgate' of Anglo-American power. Countless films in the post-war period, as a consequence, reflect the prestige and projection of English and the axiomatic self-confidence of its speakers. The producer Prokosch, in Godard's *Contempt*, embodies the self-importance and linguistic arrogance of the industrial managers of American cinema; while he is more or less monolingual, his European collaborators move more easily from language to language. In *Der Amerikanische Freund* (*The American Friend*, 1977), Wim Wenders calls attention to the lack of linguistic reciprocity between American and European. The major non-American characters all speak English along with their native language, while the American friend Tom, the 'cowboy in Hamburg', speaks only English. Jonathon's last sentence to the Swiss doctor — 'It hurts in any language' — echoes another filmic demonstration of linguistic non-reciprocity: Miguel/Michael's response in *Touch of Evil* to Quinlan's insistence that he speak English and not Spanish: 'I think it will be unpleasant in any language.' Like many New German films, *The American Friend* critically foregrounds the widespread dissemination of English and of American popular culture, thus illustrating the ways that 'the Yanks', as another Wenders character puts it in *Kings of the Road*, 'have colonised our subconscious'.[29]

One could speak as well, in this context, of any number of metaphorical 'colonisations' having to do with region, class, race and gender. Human beings do not enter simply into language as a master code; they participate in it as socially constituted subjects. Where there is no true communality of interest, power relations determine the conditions of social meeting and linguistic exchange. Even monolingual societies are characterised by heteroglossia; they englobe multiple 'languages' or 'dialects' which both reveal and produce social position, each existing in a distinct relation to the hegemonic language. The 'word', in Bakhtin's sense, is a sensitive barometer of social pressure and dynamics. In many British New Wave films, upper-class English is worn like a coat of arms, an instrument of exclusion, while working-class speech is carried like a stigmata. A cynical reincarnation of Eliza Doolittle, the protagonist of Clive Donner's *Nothing But the Best* (1964), gradually sheds his working class speech in favour of Oxbridge English in order to scale the social heights. In Perry Henzell's *The Harder They Come* (1973), similarly, the singer-protagonist's lower-class status is marked by his speaking Jamaican 'dialect' while the upper-class figures more closely approximate 'standard' English, thus positing a homology between class and linguistic hegemony. (A dialect, it has been said, is only a 'language without an

29 The wide dissemination of American cultural forms accounts for the frequent non-translation into German of American film titles: *Easy Rider, American Graffiti, Taxi Driver, Hair, Apocalypse Now* and *Reds* were all left untranslated for German exhibition. In other cases, titles were changed into *different* English titles: *Being There* became *Welcome, Mr. Chance.* Or an original English title is supplemented by a German addition: *The Fog* becomes: *The Fog: Der Nebel des Grauen* ('The Fog of Horror').

30 The use of the term 'dialect' apparently dates back to the early colonial era, when it was assumed that verbal communication systems unaccompanied by extensive written literature were somehow unworthy of the term 'language'. Thus, Europe speaks languages while Africa, for example, speaks 'dialects'. In fact, a country like Nigeria speaks hundreds of *languages*, i.e. fully developed linguistic systems which, unlike dialects, are not mutually intelligible.

31 A study of the relation between sexual difference and language difference in the cinema would necessarily touch on the play of gender in films whose diegesis features multiple languages (e.g. the association of Catherine in *Jules and Jim* with the German neuter and androgyny); and the implications for film of the fact that different languages 'see' gender differently.

32 For Memmi on colonial bilingualism, see *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1967.

army', or, we might add, without economic or political power.[30]) Issues of race also intersect with questions of language, power, and social stratification. Black English in the United States was often called 'bad' English because linguists failed to take into account the specific African-historical roots and imminent logical structure of black speech. Not unlike women, blacks developed internal codes of communication and defence, a coded language of resistance.[31] One of the innovations of Melbin Van Peebles' *Sweet Sweetback's Baadaas Song* (1971) – whose very title resonates with black intonations – was to abandon Sidney Poitier just-like-white-people middle-class diction in order to get down and talk black.

The interest of Sembène's *Black Girl* lies in having the film's female protagonist stand at the point of convergence of multiple oppressions – as maid, as black, as woman, as African – and in conveying her oppression specifically through language. Diouana, who the spectator knows to be fluent in French, overhears her employer say of her: 'She understands French ... by instinct ... like an animal'. The colonialist, who, according to Fanon, cannot speak of the colonised without resorting to the bestiary, here transforms the most defining human characteristic – the capacity for language – into a sign of animality. The gap of knowledge between the spectator, aware of Diouana's fluency, and her unknowing French employers, serves to expose the colonialist habit of linguistic non-reciprocity. This typically colonialist asymmetry (Diouana knows their language but they do not know hers) distinguishes colonial bilingualism from ordinary linguistic dualism. For the coloniser, as Memmi points out, the language and culture of the colonised are degraded and unworthy of interest, while for the colonised mastery of the coloniser's tongue is both means for survival and a daily humiliation. The colonised language exercises no power and enjoys no prestige in everyday life; it is not used in government offices or the court system, and even street signs make the native feel foreign in his/her own land. Possession of two languages is not here a matter of having two tools, but rather entails participation in two conflicting psychic and cultural realms. Through a long apprenticeship in unequal dialogue, the colonised becomes simultaneously self and other. The mother tongue, which holds emotional impact and in which tenderness and wonder are expressed, is precisely the one least valued.[32]

For the coloniser, to be human is to speak *his* language. In countless films, linguistic discrimination goes hand in hand with condescending characterisation and distorted social portraiture. The Native Americans of Hollywood westerns, denuded of their own idiom, mouth pidgin English, a mark of their inability to master the 'civilised' language. In many films set in the Third World, the language of the colonised is reduced to a jumble of background noises while the 'native' characters are obliged to meet the coloniser on the latter's linguistic turf. In films set in North Africa, Arabic exists as an indecipherable murmur, while the 'real' language is the French of Jean Gabin in *Pépé le Moko* or the English of Bogart and Bergman in *Casablanca*. Even in David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), pretentiously, even ostentatiously, sympathetic to the

Arabs, we hear almost no Arabic but rather English spoken in a motley of accents almost all of which (Omar Sharif's being the exception) have little to do with Arabic. The Arabs' paralinguistic war cries, meanwhile, recall the 'barbaric yawp' of the 'Indians' of countless westerns. The caricatural representation of Arabic in the cinema prolongs the Eurocentric 'orientalist' tradition in both linguistics and literature. Ernst Renan invented the contrast, flattering to Europe's self-image, between the 'organic' and 'dynamic' Indo-European languages, and the 'inorganic' Semitic languages – 'arrested, totally ossified, incapable of self-regeneration'.[33] For romantics such as Lamartine, Nerval and Flaubert, meanwhile, the Orient served as a mirror for their western narcissism, when it was not a backdrop for the pageant of their sensibilities. Lamartine saw his trip to the Orient as 'un grand acte de ma vie intérieure' ('a great act in my interior life') and discoursed with supreme confidence on the subject of Arabic poetry despite his total ignorance of the language.[34] Twentieth-century film-makers, in certain respects, have inherited the attitudes of the nineteenth-century philological tradition (so ably anatomised by Said), pointing out 'defects, virtues, barbarisms, and shortcomings in the language, the people and the civilization'.[35]

Colonising cinema, meanwhile, committed its own 'barbarisms' in relation to the languages of the colonised. One of the Italian directors who dominated the early history of film-making in Egypt, Osato, outraged the Islamic community in his *El Zouhour el Katela* (*Fatal Flowers*, 1918) by garbling well-known phrases from the Koran. A similarly cavalier attitude toward linguistic sensitivities led to the misattribution of major languages. Mervyn Leroy's *Latin Lovers* (1953), for example, mistakenly suggests that the national language of Brazil is Spanish. Although Carmen Miranda was called the 'Brazilian bombshell', the names given her characters (such as Rosita Conchellas in *A Date with Judy*, 1948), were more Hispanic than Brazilian.[36] Although she reportedly spoke excellent English, she was prodded to speak in her distinctive caricatural manner (the linguistic correlative of her Tutti-Frutti hat), thus reflecting one of many ways that Latins were ridiculed by Hollywood cinema. The dubbed version of Marcel Camus' *Orfeu Negro* (*Black Orpheus*, 1959), finally, substitutes a variety of Caribbean accents in English for the Brazilian Portuguese of the original, thus placing diverse Third World communities under what Memmi calls 'the mark of the plural': 'They are all the same'.

The existing global distribution of power makes the First World nations of the West cultural 'transmitters' while it reduces Third World nations to 'receivers'. Given this unidirectional flow of sounds, images and information, Third World countries are constantly inundated with North American cultural products – from television series and Hollywood films to best-sellers and top-forty hits. The omnipresence of English phrases in Brazil, for example, can be seen as a linguistic symptom of neo-colonialism. A carnival samba penned shortly after the arrival of American sound films already lamented the widespread currency of English phrases: 'Goodbye, goodbye boy/Quit your mania for speaking English/It doesn't become you ... '. One stanza explicitly links the dis-

[33] See Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York, Pantheon, 1978, p 142.

[34] ibid, pp 177-78.

[35] ibid, p 142.

[36] Stanley Donen's *Blame It on Rio* continues this tradition of Hispanicising Brazilian names.

37 Israel, interestingly, offers a similar phenomenon. Many members of the film milieu considered Hebrew as intrinsically non-cinematic and an 'obstacle' to 'good' dialogue, implicitly suggesting a kind of shame about speaking a Semitic rather than a European language. The protagonist of a '70s TV series, *Hedva ve Ani* ('Hedva and I') complained that it is impossible to say 'Ani Ohev Otach' (Hebrew 'I Love You') because unlike 'I Love You' or 'Je t'aime' it is 'ugly'.

semination of English to the economic power of the Anglo-American electricity monopoly 'Light'; 'It's no longer *Boa Noite* or *Bom Dia*/Now it's Good Morning and Good Night/And in the *favelas* they scorn the kerosene lamp/and only use the light from Light.' Hollywood, meanwhile, became the beacon toward which the Third World looked, the model of 'true' cinema. The linguistic corollary of domination was the assumption that some languages were inherently more 'cinematic' than others. The English 'I Love You', Brazilian critics argued in the twenties, was infinitely more beautiful and cinematic than the Portuguese '*Eu te amo*'. The focus on the phrase 'I Love You' is in this case highly overdetermined, reflecting not only the lure of a romantic model of cinema projecting glamour and beautiful stars, but also an intuitive sense of the erotics of linguistic colonialism – i.e. that the colonising language exercises a kind of phallic power. Behind the preference as well was the notion that there are 'beautiful' and 'ugly' languages, a notion which came to pervade countries with a colonised complex of inferiority.[37] It was in the face of this prejudice that Brazilian film-maker Arnaldo Jabor defiantly entitled his recent film *Eu Te Amo* (1981) and insisted that the title remain in Portuguese even when distributed abroad.

It is against this same backdrop that we must understand the linguistic duality of Carlos Diegues' *Bye Bye Brazil*. Precisely because of the widespread dissemination of English, the film was titled in English even in Brazil. The theme song by Chico Buarque features English expressions like 'bye bye' and 'night and day' and 'OK' as an index of the Americanisation (and multinationalisation) of a world where tribal chiefs wear designer jeans and backwoods rock groups sound like the Bee Gees. Even the name of the travelling entertainment troupe – 'Caravana Rolidei' – a phonetic transcription of the Brazilian pronunciation of the English 'holiday' – reflects this linguistic colonisation. A typical colonial ambivalence operates here: on the one hand, sincere affection for an alien tongue, and on the other, the penchant for parody and creative distor-

Colonial ambivalence: cultural duality in *Bye Bye Brazil*.

tion, the refusal to 'get it straight'.

Many Third World films ring the changes on the subject of linguistic colonialism. Youssef Chahine's *Alexandria Why?*, a reflexive film about an aspiring Egyptian film-maker who entertains Hollywood dreams, explores the linguistic palimpsest that was Egypt at the time of the Second World War. Chahine offers an Egyptian perspective on western cultural products and political conflicts. From the protagonist's point of view, we watch his adored American musical comedies, subtitled in Arabic, and European newsreels with Arabic voice-over. (At certain points, in a linguistic Chinese box effect, the Arabic subtitles of the American film-within-the-film are enclosed within the English subtitles of *Alexandria Why?* itself.) In another sequence, an Egyptian theatre production pokes fun at the occupying powers. Each European power is reduced to a stereotypical cultural emblem: Hitler's moustache, Churchill's cigar, a French chef, an Italian pizza. In a reversal of traditional representation, it is now the colonised who consciously caricature the coloniser. As representatives of the Allied and the Axis powers chaotically pursue each other across the stage, each mumbling their own idiom, the Egyptian characters remain seated, spectators of an alien war on their land. Irrationality, a feature insistently projected by the West onto Arabs and their language, here boomerangs against the Europeans.

Language is a social battleground, the place where political struggles are engaged both comprehensively and intimately. In *Xala* (1975), Sembène again inter-articulates questions of language, culture and power. The protagonist, El Hadji, a polygamous Senegalese businessman who becomes afflicted with *xala* – a religiously-sanctioned curse of impotence – embodies neo-colonised attitudes of the African elite so vehemently denounced by Fanon. Sembène structures the film around the opposition of Wolof and French as the focal point of conflict. While the elite make public speeches in Wolof and wear African dress, they speak French among themselves and reveal European suits beneath their African garb. Many of the characterisations revolve around the question of language. El Hadji's first wife Adja, representing a pre-colonial African woman, speaks Wolof and wears traditional clothes. The second wife, Oumi, representing the colonised imitator of European fashions, speaks French and wears wigs, sunglasses and low-cut dresses. El Hadji's daughter, Rama, finally, representing a progressive synthesis of Africa and Europe, knows French but insists on speaking Wolof to her francophile father. Here again conflicts involving language are made to carry with them a strong charge of social and cultural tension.

The title of Glauber Rocha's *Der Leone Have Sept Cabeças* subverts the linguistic positioning of the spectator by mingling the languages of five of Africa's colonisers. Rocha's Brechtian fable animates emblematic figures representing the diverse colonisers, further suggesting an identity of roles among them by having an Italian speaker play the role of the American, a Frenchman play the German and so forth. Another polyglot fable, Raul Ruiz' *Het Dak Van de Walvis* (*The Top of the Whale*, 1981) also focuses on the linguistic aspect of oppression. The point of departure for the film, according to Ruiz, was his discovery that certain tribes

in Chile, due to their traumatising memory of genocide, spoke their own language only among themselves and never in front of a European.[38] The resulting tale, about a French anthropologist's visit to the last surviving members of an Indian tribe whose language has defied all attempts at interpretation, is turned by Ruiz into a sardonic demystification of the colonialist undergirdings of anthropology.

The intonation of the same word, Bakhtin argues, differs profoundly between inimical social groups. 'You taught me language', Caliban tells Prospero in *The Tempest*, 'and my profit on it is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you for learning me your language.' In the social life of the utterance as a concrete social act, we began by saying, each word is subject to rival pronunciations, intonations and allusions. While the discourse of Power strives to officialise a single language, one dialect among many, into *the* Language, in fact language is the site of heteroglossia, open to historical process. There is no political struggle, according to Bakhtin, that does not also pass through the word. Languages can serve to oppress and alienate, but also to liberate. We have tried to question the presumption of the masters of language. The 'system' of language so dear to the Saussureans, we have implicitly suggested, is subject to what Bakhtin calls centripetal and centrifugal forces; it is always susceptible to subversion. By shifting attention from the abstract system of *langue* to the concrete heterogeneity of *parole*, we have tried to stress the dialogic nature of language in the cinema, its constantly changing relationship to power, and thus point to the possibility of reappropriating its dynamism in the world.

ERRATUM

Re *Screen* vol 26 no 2, March-April, 1985

Unfortunately, some pages of Sandy Flitterman's article, 'Thighs and Whiskers — the Fascination of Magnum, p. i.', became transposed. As printed, pp 52 and 53 should be read before pp 50 and 51. This error was not due to our printers.

[38] See 'Entretien avec Raoul Ruiz', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, March 1983.

in Chile, due to their traumatising memory of genocide, spoke their own language only among themselves and never in front of a European.[38] The resulting tale, about a French anthropologist's visit to the last surviving members of an Indian tribe whose language has defied all attempts at interpretation, is turned by Ruiz into a sardonic demystification of the colonialist undergirdings of anthropology.

The intonation of the same word, Bakhtin argues, differs profoundly between inimical social groups. 'You taught me language', Caliban tells Prospero in *The Tempest*, 'and my profit on it is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you for learning me your language.' In the social life of the utterance as a concrete social act, we began by saying, each word is subject to rival pronunciations, intonations and allusions. While the discourse of Power strives to officialise a single language, one dialect among many, into *the* Language, in fact language is the site of heteroglossia, open to historical process. There is no political struggle, according to Bakhtin, that does not also pass through the word. Languages can serve to oppress and alienate, but also to liberate. We have tried to question the presumption of the masters of language. The 'system' of language so dear to the Saussureans, we have implicitly suggested, is subject to what Bakhtin calls centripetal and centrifugal forces; it is always susceptible to subversion. By shifting attention from the abstract system of *langue* to the concrete heterogeneity of *parole*, we have tried to stress the dialogic nature of language in the cinema, its constantly changing relationship to power, and thus point to the possibility of reappropriating its dynamism in the world.

ERRATUM

Re *Screen* vol 26 no 2, March-April, 1985

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Bristol University Extra-Mural Studies Department/Watershed

Film Summer School 1985

Sunday 21 – Friday 26 July at Watershed

In the wake of the Oscar successes of *Chariots of Fire* and *Ghandi,* 1985 has been designated 'British Film Year'. In the midst of the celebrations and criticisms of the Year itself, our third Summer School asks just what is a "British" film? To what extent can an industry apparently dominated by American funding, distribution and forms be regarded as British?

Drawing examples from the contemporary film industry, wartime British cinema and Hollywood the school will examine the structures that underpin and undermine the notions of an indigenous film industry and look at the underlying effects of television.

The school will combine presentations, seminars and guest speakers and will include the following films:*Henry V, The Wicked Lady, Company of Wolves, This Happy Breed, Local Hero, Dead of Night* and *A Private Function.*

Tutors:

Dr Elizabeth Bird	(Staff Tutor in Sociology, University of Bristol)
Susan Boyd-Bowman	(Open University lecturer and educational TV producer)
Andrew Higson	(Lecturer in film studies Sunderland Polytechnic and member of *Screen* editorial board)
Steve Pinhay	(Director, Watershed)

Names of guest speakers will appear in next monthly brochure.

The course is open to residential and non-residential students with residential places at Manor Hall, University of Bristol.

Fees: Residential £86 (bed and breakfast) (£62 students, claimants, OAPs), Non-Residential £48 (£24 students, claimants and OAPs).

Initial enquiries on all aspects of the School should be made to Liz Bird at the Univeristy of Bristol Extra-Mural Studies Department. (Tel. 0272 24161 ext K220 or K221). The Film Summer School is supported by BFI.

BRITISH FILM YEAR

BLACK AFRICAN CINEMA IN THE EIGHTIES

A SURVEY BY ROY ARMES

Jeune de vingt ans, le cinéma d'Afrique noire est encore à l'aube de son devenir.

— Ferid Boughedir

THIS ARTICLE STEMS from several years research into African cinema which has taken me to the three major African film festivals (Carthage, Ouagadougou, Mogadishu) as well as various gatherings in Europe.[1] The research owes much to the work of a small number of energetic and committed francophone critics (Guy Hennebelle, Victor Bachy, Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, Ferid Boughedir, Charles Lemaire), whose efforts in a variety of books, articles and conference papers have done much to elucidate the issues and to establish the factual basis on which future research can be built. This present article, which forms part of a forthcoming study of Arab and African cinema, is based on a viewing of 36 of the 67 or so feature films which would seem to have been produced in black Africa during the five years 1980-1984. Not all these films have as yet been seen even inside their countries of origin. For example, Wole Soyinka's study of the Shegari era in Nigeria, *Blues for a Prodigal*, was seized by the authorities when due to open at the

National Theatre in Lagos, and many other black African features have found no commercial distributors. Since the films themselves are virtually unknown in the United Kingdom, I have tried to set them in the context of the development of Third World cinema and to draw out points of wider interest. In particular the difficulties encountered by African film-makers emphasise the need for studies of the economic organisation and control of western cinemas. Too often such studies as currently exist – and here I include my own histories of British and French cinema – deal with a 'national' cinema whose autonomy and unity is simply assumed. Study of cinema in Africa shows this to be a myth. Being a purely commercial operation, distribution has no need to be linked geographically to the studios where films are made or to the film theatres where they are shown. But even when operating from afar, it remains the key sector of the industry.

[2] John Iliffe, *The Emergence of African Capitalism*, London, Macmillan, 1983, pp 64-65.

[3] ibid, p 65.

I.

The failure to build a black African film industry over the past decade – despite the valiant efforts of individual film-makers and a number of governments – is hardly surprising in view of the fact that modern indus- try of any kind in Africa dates only from World War II when, as John Iliffe points out in a recent study of *The Emergence of African Capitalism*, 'several circumstances came together to change the old pattern of export- ed raw materials and imported manufactures': colonial governments seeking to diversify their economies, local European settlers aiming for greater autonomy and foreign firms seeking commercial advantages[2]. As late as 1950 in Nigeria, which was later to become something of an economic giant in black African terms, the manufacturing sector still provided 'only 0.45 per cent of GNP (the smallest proportion of any country producing statistics)'[3]. To the problem of late capitalism was added that of foreign control: since the initial industrialisation occurred under colonial rule, early industrial enterprises tended to be owned by foreign capital. All Third World film industries have been created by indigenous capital attracted by the profits to be derived from catering for the entertainment needs of the new audience composed of those drawn into the cash economy by urban industrialisation and the rural exodus. But black Africa, coming late to industrialisation, missed out on the boom which, in India and Egypt for example, was occasioned by World War II speculation. In these instances cinema came to be seen as an excellent investment for undeclared profits from the illegitimate economy. In black Africa, however, though subsequent programmes aimed at giving indigenous control of foreign firms have certainly enriched local elites in countries like Nigeria and Zaire, there have been far more lucrative and less speculative outlets for reinvestment than a nascent film industry. The industrial infrastructure for cinema – studios, sound and editing facilities, laboratories – is therefore almost *completely*

3 others (Senegal, Ivory Coast, Niger). No other black African country has produced even one film a year during the period.

BLACK AFRICAN FILM-MAKING IN THE 1980s

Country	Films	Film-makers			
		Total	Estimated before 1980	Debuts	Two or more films
NIGERIA	22	12	3	9	5
CAMEROON	11	7	3	4	3
SENEGAL	6	6	3	3	—
IVORY COAST	6	6	—	6	—
NIGER	5	5	3	2	—
BURKINA FASO	3	3	—	3	—
MALI	3	3	1	2	—
GHANA	3	3	1	2	—
CONGO	2	1	—	1	1
ANGOLA	2	2	—	2	—
GUINEA	2	2	—	2	—
ZAIRE	2	2	—	2	—
MADAGASCAR	1	1	—	1	—
TOTALS	68	53	14	39	9

Nowhere is there the possibility of a satisfying career for a film-maker. Some of the major figures in African cinema, such as Ousmane Sembène and Med Hondo, have been unable to make even a single film in the five year period, though both have projects on which they have been working for years. Of the fourteen film-makers who had made at least one feature before 1980 (and only one active director, Ola Balogun, had made more

than three before 1980), only five (three from Nigeria and two from Cameroon) succeeded in making more than one film over five years. No less than 39 of the 67 films are first features by new directors, but only four of these managed to complete a second film. Though it is often convenient to consider film-makers in national groupings (since these will often have specific problems and opportunities in common), there is no way in which we can talk meaningfully of a 'national cinema' when output is so low.

These African films are personal creations in a way that films can never be once film-making is fully industrialised. The African film-maker (almost invariably a man – no feature films have been made in black Africa by a woman in the 1980s) has to concern himself personally with raising the money for his film from state or private sources. Usually it is his own company that produces or co-produces the film or, if the film is produced by a national film corporation, it is likely that he will be the official in charge of production. He will normally have written the script as well as directed it – sometimes appearing too as actor – and often he will have to take a very direct part in arranging local screenings. He will be his film's sole publicist accompanying his film to foreign festivals. It may be argued that this is the fate of any independent film-maker, but where the African film-maker is unique is that he is working in a context where there is no real tradition of film-making, no standard procedure for organising production or conventional source of film finance, no pool of experienced technical or acting talent and virtually no appropriate models for a film's dramaturgy or visual style. Every African film therefore represents an awesome personal effort on the part of its maker, whose rewards will be strictly limited. He and his backers are likely to take years to recover their investment (if at all), the local market is most probably so unregulated that he will never receive the return appropriate to the audience his film has attracted, foreign commercial screenings – in Africa or elsewhere – are rare, and the chances of making another film within four or five years are remote. Nonetheless films do continue to be made in black Africa.

African cinema has grown up largely separate from the African literature and drama in European languages which has been a key element of black African cultural production since the '50s. Apart from Wole Soyinka's recent venture into the cinema, Ousmane Sembène is the only major novelist to turn to film-making and he has spent the first half of the 1980s seeking backing for his major study, in two feature-length parts, of the nineteenth century West African leader, the Almany Samori Turay, who put up a stubborn resistance to French imperialist ambitions. Thanks to sub-titles, African films in local languages are not necessarily impenetrable to outsiders – they can be enjoyed by (literate) audiences throughout the world. The major African films of the '80s – like most of those of the '70s – have been made in indigenous languages, but it is notable that the two countries which produce the most films and possess the film-makers most concerned with purely commercial success – Nigeria and Cameroon – both have a tradition of

[4] ibid, p 67.

[5] See the series, *Cinémas d'Afrique noire*, edited by Victor Bachy and published by OCIC in collaboration with L'Harmatt in Paris (five volumes to the end of 1984).

lacking in black Africa, with the privately owned Cinafric studios in Ouagadougou (capital of Burkina Faso, formerly Upper Volta) standing as virtually the sole realisation of the commonly held capitalist dream of establishing local production facilities as a prelude to venturing forth onto the international film scene. But Ouagadougou remains a para-doxical location for Cinafric (as for most of francophone black Africa's cinema organisations) since Burkina Faso is one of the world's poorest countries and possesses barely a dozen cinemas for its five million inhabitants.

The factors which go to shape cultural production in black Africa constitute only partial grids, each of which implies a different set of divisions. Though traditional beliefs persist, the varying penetration of Islam and Christianity tends to differentiate the North from the South – Muslim Niger, for example from Congo or Zaire. Traditions of capital-ist development, in contrast, make a division between East and West. In West Africa entrepreneurs emerged largely from artisanship and trade, whereas in East Africa they have tended to come 'through the straddling process of western education and modern-sector employment'[4]. This finds its reflection in cinema to the extent that there is no equivalent in East Africa to the individual initiatives, backed by local capital, which have led to the production of fictional feature films in Nigeria and Ghana. There is an extensive and well-organised production and distri-bution of films in East Africa, through the Kenyan Institute of Mass Communication, for example. But all this local production is of docu-mentaries serving government educational and agricultural programmes and even in the 1980s remains an expression of official views and ambitions: there have been no initiatives for privately funded features. Of course, the most important set of divisions in black Africa is that deriving from colonialism, which even after 25 years of formal independence continues to tie states – and in particular their Western-educated elites – to the former colonial capitals of Europe – London, Paris, Brussels.

European influences on the development of cinema – from the efforts of Belgian missionaries in Zaire to the traditions of 'neutral' informational documentary in anglophone Africa – continue into the 1980s. 't is the Catholic organisation OCIC (Organisation Catholique Internationale du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel) which in the 1980s has done most to bring African film-making to European attention[5], and undoubtedly given many young African film-makers an orientation towards Europe. The lack of post-production facilities in black Africa means that most films are finished in Europe, which not only increases enormously the cost of African production but also cannot fail to influence the attitudes of film-makers. But December 1980 did see an attempt by certain African states to break free from the most highly developed of these foreign shaping influences, with the ending at their insistence of the system of aid to francophone African film-makers through the French Ministère de la Coopération. This remarkable seventeen year example of 'enlightened neo-colonialism' was the main

force behind the development of film-making in the fourteen states of what was previously French West and Equatorial Africa. (For example, 125 of the 185 films of all kinds made between 1963 and 1975 received Coopération technical and/or financial assistance[6].) The method of finance, through the purchase, at a larger than normal fee, of the non-commercial distribution rights in the film by the French ministry, was quite separate from the commercial film distribution system in franco-phone black Africa, itself controlled until the 1970s by a French commercial duopoly. The result of the Coopération scheme was the production of a great number of films which would not otherwise have been made, but these were ghettoised in Africa (finding showings only in French cultural centres), and more accessible in Paris (through the ministry's archive) than in Africa. The scheme did little to bring African film-making to African popular audiences, but it has given francophone Africa a tradition of personal 'art' cinema, often only tenuously rooted in the specificities of the maker's national culture and the demands of a mass audience, which persists into the '80s, long after the cessation of the system.

The cultural importance attached to film by the French Ministère de la Coopération also served to bring cinema to the attention of franco-phone African governments, so that initiatives to support film-making are stronger in, say, Senegal or Burkina Faso than in Nigeria. But the problems of film-makers struggling to create commercially viable film production remain the same throughout black Africa and point to the need for government assistance in such matters as the regulation of the import and distribution of foreign films, the reduction of taxes on cinema admission (set at extremely high levels by most colonial adminis-trations), the establishment of a national ticketing system (which alone would ensure producers a fair return on local distribution), production assistance at home and promotion abroad. But film fits awkwardly into the state's institutional priorities it cannot be seen as a governmental achievement in modernisation (like the building of a dam or industrial complex), nor is it an aspect of traditional culture to be promoted internationally along with, say, local carpet making or rural handicrafts. For African rulers, usually Western-educated and always sensitive to the image of their country abroad, a speculatively financed local film production designed for the mass audience would be the last type of product to be advertised abroad, while a film which looked critically at local society would be simply intolerable to them. On the rare occasions when Third World governments have become culturally involved with film – as in India with the National Film Development Corporation – the result has usually been rather like the efforts of the French Minis-tère de la Coopération: the creation of a hybrid product – part local, part Westernised – which no longer corresponds to local audience taste.

One area in which international organisations such as UNESCO and the Paris-based Agence de Coopération Culturelle et Technique can make an unambiguously positive contribution is through support for events and organisations allowing African film-makers to meet to

6 Jean-René Debrix, interview, in Guy Hennebelle and Catherine Ruelle (eds), Cinéastes d'Afrique noire, Paris, CinémAction, no 111 and L'Afrique Littéraire et Artistique, no 49, 1978, p 153.

exchange views, see each other's films and debate issues. Africa has two long-established biennial film festivals which have continued to prosper in the 1980s, the JCC (Journées Cinématographiques de Carthage), established in Tunis in 1966 and holding its tenth festival in 1984, and FESPACO (Festival Panafricaine de Ouagadougou) established in 1969 and celebrating its ninth gathering in 1985. These two have now been joined by a third festival, this time in anglophone East Africa, MOGPAFIS (Mogadishu Pan-African Film Symposium) which held meetings in the capital of Somalia in 1981 and 1983. These festivals have provided a crucial context for members of the professional organisation of African film-makers, FEPACI (Fédération Pan-africaine des Cinéastes). Established in 1970 and granted observer status at the Organisation of African Unity, FEPACI has continued to be an active force through the efforts of its individual members, though the congress held in Ouagadougou in February 1985 was the first for a decade. Meanwhile the institutional inertia of FEPACI prompted two complementary initiatives in 1981: L'Oeil Vert, a group of black African film-makers interested by the possibility of collective film-making, and CAC (Comité Africain de Cinéastes) a Paris-based distribution organisation headed by the exiled Mauritanian film-maker, Med Hondo.

The 1980s have been a time of enforced reflection for African film-makers, faced with the fact that fifteen years of struggle have not led to the establishment of a film industry anywhere in black Africa. A major statement of their position is to be found in the manifesto issued after a meeting held in Niamey in March 1982. Of particular interest are the five general principles which underlie the various propositions put forward:

— developments in production must be linked to those in the sectors of exhibition, import and distribution of films, technical infrastructure and professional training;

— the intervention of the state is needed to promote and protect private and public investment;

— measures to promote cinema are not viable on a purely national level but need to have a regional and interafrican dimension;

— future developments in African cinema will need to be made in collaboration with television institutions;

— finance for developments in cinema can be found within cinema itself, in the receipts from the showing of foreign films.[7]

The discussions held at Carthage in 1984 continued in a similar vein, drawing up a balance sheet of developments since the festival was established in 1969 and setting out to consider in detail the impact (or lack of impact) of the various resolutions passed at earlier conferences. In a lucid and informative paper presented at Carthage, Ferid Boughedir traced 'The Evolution of Strategies for the Viability of National Cinemas in Africa from 1967 to 1984'[8]. Taking as his starting point the definition of distribution as the key sector of the film industry made by Tahar Cheriaa, the founder of the Carthage festival, in 1967, Boughedir looks back at the African film-makers' initial cry for total nationalisation.

[7] The text of the Niamey manifesto is reprinted in Guy Hennebelle (ed), *Cinémas noirs d'Afrique*, Paris, *CinémAction*, no 26, 1983, pp 168-172.

[8] Ferid Boughedir, 'De l'Idéal à la Pratique: L'Evolution des Stratégies pour la Viabilité des Cinémas Nationaux en Afrique de 1967 à 1984', conference paper presented at the Journées Cinématographiques de Carthage, 1984.

Seeing the crucial problems as foreign control of distribution, national markets too small to support a national cinema and the failure to return money taken from cinema in taxation to foster production, film-makers of the late '60s and early '70s placed their reliance on state control. But the ensuing years have shown the limitations of this approach. National film corporations remain vital to control import of foreign films and to regulate the domestic market, but have generally had little positive impact as production organisations: new in the '80s is the respect offered by African film-makers to private producers.

The ideal of film common markets linking regional groups of countries has also proved difficult to realise. In 1981 CIDC (Consortium Interafricain de Distribution Cinématographique) came into operation after years of patient effort, taking into African hands for the first time film import and distribution in the fourteen states of francophone black Africa, where it had previously been controlled by a succession of French-owned companies. The aim was to create a system which would both allow the commercial showing of African films to the African mass audience and, with the profits from the screenings of foreign films, support a parallel production organisation, CIPRO Films (Centre Inter-africain de Production de Films). As Boughedir points out, things have not gone smoothly:
— most states did not reform their tax structures to allow the common market to come properly into operation;
— most did not pay their contributions to CIDC;
—many national cinema organisations saw distribution purely as a commercial operation and were uninterested in a cultural role (such as that of finding an audience for African films);
— many exhibitors refused to show African films (though some of those which were properly distributed achieved remarkable commercial success);
— the lack of national ticketing systems prevented the monitoring and control of the market.
By 1984 the CIDC, which in any case had only 50 African films among the 1,200 it distributed (that is, barely four per cent) had lost the confidence of African film-makers and its operation had come virtually to a halt, leaving the market vulnerable again to US films distributed through a Swiss-registered company, SOCOPRINT, which has shown no interest in handling films made by Africans.

II.

Turning to production, the figures set out in the following table eloquently demonstrate the huge difficulties facing the black African film-maker. The 68 feature films produced over the 5 year period 1980-1984 have come from 13 countries in all, with half (33 films) from just two countries (Nigeria and Cameroon) and a quarter (17 films) from

9 Victor Bachy, 'Panoramique sur les Cinémas Sud-Sahariens', in Guy Hennebelle (1983), op cit, p 31.

film-making in the language of the former coloniser. In Nigeria, both Ola Balogun with *Cry Freedom* and Eddie Ugbomah with *Death of a Black President* have worked in English, and the latter film, a ponderous if well-intentioned drama-documentary on the assassination of President Murtala Muhamed, shows the particular problems of this kind of approach: unconvincing characterisation and leaden dialogue sequences. The writing and performing in English of scenes which would inevitably be acted out in indigenous languages gives film-making of this kind an air of contrivance akin to the sense of a 'literature in translation' that characterises many of the African novels written in English. In Ghana too, films like *Love Brewed in the African Pot*, directed by Kwaw Paintsil Ansah and *Kukurantumi*, directed by King Ampaw, play out their conventional themes of the clash of generations or the contrast of rural goodness and urban corruption in ways that give fascinating glimpses of Ghana's evolving society, while retaining a 'stagey' tone in their key dramatic scenes.

In Cameroon, a country with apparently 427 local languages[9], virtually all the film-making so far has been in French and much of it has had no more than purely commercial ambitions. Installed in Paris since 1975, Alphonse Béni has directed a series of what Boughedir terms 'erotico-disco' thrillers, and his example has been followed by a 1980s newcomer, Jules Takam. The latter's *L'Appât du gain* is essentially a low-budget French production with a black cast. Ostensibly a political thriller about Western exploitation and African corruption, the film's confused plot is little more than a pretext for the series of a dozen or so murders committed by its macho-style vigilante hero. More authentically African in setting are director Daniel Kamwa's commercially highly successful comedies such as *Notre fille* which deals with the contrasting life-styles of a Paris-educated elder daughter and her village chief father, with his eight wives and 30 children. The film's theatrical style and use of the very real problems of African cultural identity for purely farcical ends have provoked the hostility of African critics, but many of the incidental (exaggerated?) details it offers of the life of the Frenchified elite are fascinating (the need to wear a tie to be respected and to enjoy camembert to be considered sophisticated; the preference for local fruit that has been exported, canned and reimported for sale in the local supermarket, and so on). French is also the chosen language for the first two films produced by Burkina Faso's privately owned Cinafric studios, the French director Christian Richard's *Le Courage des autres* and Sanou Kollo's *Pawéogo/L'Emigrant*.

Set against this excessive Western influence in the use of local dramatic forms in certain films from Guinea and Nigeria. The Guinean film *Naïtou l'orpheline*, directed by Moussa Kemoko Diakité, features the national ballet troupe dancing out, in natural settings, a two hour drama of rival wives and an ill-treated daughter. *Naïtou* combines initiation rites and nude bathing scenes, ghosts and scenes of madness. Similarly, in Nigeria, the '80s have seen the production of a number of adaptations of Yoruba folk dramas, written for theatrical performance

and set in an idyllic rural world untouched by colonialism or modernity. The series began in 1980 with *Aiye*, directed by Ola Balogun, and since then three of the leading Yoruba dramatists and performers, Chief Hubert Ogunde, Ade Love and Baba Sala, have directed versions of some of their own dramas. Balogun's former assistant Bankole Bello, followed in the same vein with his first film, *Efuntesan*, a period tale of a rich slave-owning woman whose cruelties were stopped by communal action. Perhaps the most elaborate of the series is Balogun's *Orun Mooru*, featuring the Yoruba comic Baba Sala in a story mixing folklore and rural comedy, traditional songs and dances, satire on the modern rich and elaborate trick effects (for a ghostly dream sequence). This kind of interplay between cinema and local dance and drama promises to be highly fruitful, since it offers a genuinely popular cinema which is not derivative of Western film models. Though to date the resources of film have been used to do little more than record performances already elaborated in stage terms, Balogun's work shows how these elements can be blended with influences drawn from Indian film melodrama to create a cinema of more than regional appeal. At present, however, these productions remain at a largely artisanal level, with Ogunde, for instance, acting as his own distributor and exhibitor and taking the sole print of his films on tour on his theatrical circuit for showing in any available public space.

Since the ending in 1980 of the production system devised by the French Ministère de la Coopération, African cinema has struggled to find alternative local sources of production finance, as yet with only limited success. In the larger countries such as Nigeria and Zaire hundreds of cinemas exist, but many of these are extremely primitive and they are not organised in a way that will support local film production. The very lack of precise statistics indicates the extent to which the market is uncontrolled with dozens of 'exhibition outlets' operating illegally to avoid the payment of taxes. Indigenisation measures have done little to improve the situation and in Zaire, for example, only two features have been produced in the '80s, one with equipment from educational television and the other with foreign funding from religious sources in Rome. Nigeria has a well-developed and richly funded television system which could in theory help support film-making, but to date no production finance has been forthcoming and Nigerian producers have been offered only derisory sums for screenings of such films as do exist. In francophone Niger – a country which has produced a number of striking films despite the fact that it has less than a dozen cinemas – the newly established television service (ORTN) has proved more enterprising and the three Niger films shown at the Ouagadougou festival in 1983 were all ORTN productions: Mustapha Alassane's *Kankamba*, Bakabé Mahamane's *Si les cavaliers...* and Djingarey Maiga's *Aube noire*.

In many ways African films are defined more by the source of their production finance than in terms of a national identity. Some privately funded films are still highly personal cries of anguish at the effects of

cultural disorientation of a kind common ten or fifteen years ago. *L'Homme d'ailleurs*, for example, directed by Mori Traoré from the Ivory Coast, is the story of the disintegration of a black student in Japan. Offering no view of Japanese society or culture, the film concentrates on the slow progress of its hero (played by the director who also wrote the script) towards a predictable suicide. *Suicides*, another self-financed film, directed by Jean-Claude Tchüilen from Cameroon, traces the decline of an African student who witnesses the suicide of a rich French woman.

By contrast, films produced by national film organisations tend to take an optimistic view of human possibilities, laying stress on co-operation. The archetype of this kind of cinema is *Les Coopérants*, directed by Arthur Sibita and produced in Cameroon by the Fonds de Développement de l'Industrie Cinématographique (FODIC) and telling of a group of well-off students who volunteer to assist in a programme of rural development. Similarly, in *Jours de Tourmente*, directed by Paul Zoumbara and produced by the Centre National du Cinéma in Burkina Faso, the young people of a village get together to confront the lethargy of their elders and dig a much-needed well. *La Chapelle*, directed by Michel Tchissoukou for the Office National du Cinéma (ONACI) in the Congo, is a tale of popular resistance to the intrusion of Christianity in the 1930s. Tchissoukou was one of the few newcomers of the 1980s to complete a second film, a study of traditional wrestling, *Les Lutteurs*. *Wend Kuuni*, directed by Gaston Kaboré and produced by the CNC in Burkina Faso, combines a simple tale of a young boy found in the bush who is brought up by a friendly village family with a look at pre-colonial Mossi culture. More than simply a semi-documentary account of African rural life, *Wend Kuuni* is marked by a subtle interplay of image and music.
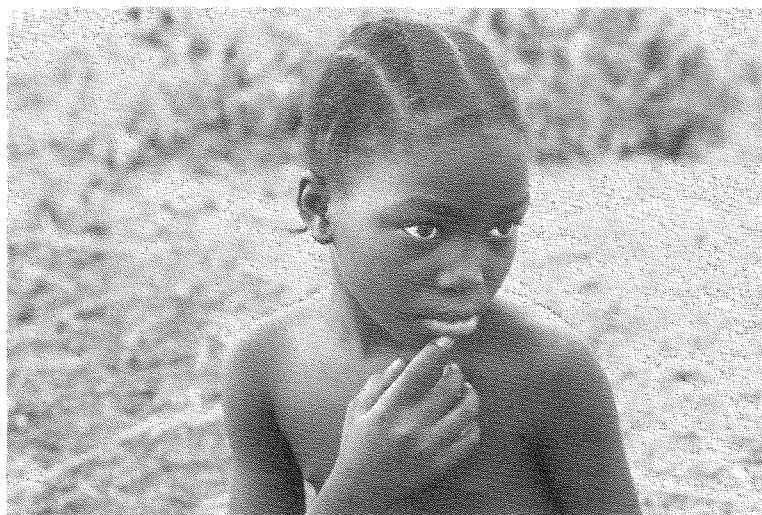
Wend Kuuni, directed by Gaston Kaboré.

The films produced by a mixture of personal, private company and official organisation funding divide into studies of tradition and looks at contemporary society. The former category contains a number of interesting explorations in the '80s. *L'Exilé*, director Oumarou Ganda's last film before his death at the age of 46 and the first to have adequate financial backing, tells a legendary tale with clear relevance to the present. *L'Exilé* captures the full flavour of the fable: the arbitrary happenings and flat characterisation, the passages of suspense and ritual repetitions. The story itself—told to guests by an ambassador in exile in Europe (Ganda himself)—turns on the importance of the word and verbal agreement in traditional African society, but in the telling a rich ambiguity emerges. Mustapha Diop's *Le Médecin de Gafire*, co-produced by the director's own company, Niger television and the national corporations of Mali (CNPC) and Burkina Faso (CNC), deals with a fascinating aspect of the clash of modernity and tradition by contrasting attitudes to medicine. *Jom*, the Senegalese director Ababacar Samb Makharam's second feature, co-produced with German television and made ten years after the director's first feature, focuses on a key West African figure, the *griot* or popular story-teller, celebrant of social values and preserver of tradition. The director uses this timeless figure to link a variety of stories, all dealing with human dignity (*jom*) ranging from a contemporary strike to early instances of resistance to the coloniser. It marks the return of one of black Africa's earliest film-makers, who made his first short in 1964.

Recent film representing contemporary African society include *En résidence surveillée*, directed by veteran Senegalese film-maker and historian of African cinema, Paulin Soumanou Viey. Here the tactical manoeuvring among members of the ruling elite is set against a coup which reinstates the ousted president in a new guise. *Pétanqui ou le Droit à la vie*, directed by Yéo Kozoloa from the Ivory Coast, contrasts its view

L'Exilé, directed by Oumarou Ganda.

of the ruling elite with television images of drought and ecological disaster and combines idealism and corruption, modernity and witchcraft. *Seye Seyeti*, directed by Ben Diogaye Beye, examines polygamy and the attitudes of present-day youth in Senegal. *Comédie exotique* – a film with partial French financing and a French cameraman – directed by the young writer Kitia Touré from the Ivory Coast – is a relatively expensive feature which returns to this contrast of traditional and modern in a story dealing with the making of a Western TV documentary about Senoufo masks.

Djeli, an Ouagadougou prize-winner made as a first feature by the Paris-educated Fadika Kramo Lanciné, examines the continuing problem of caste in the modern Ivory Coast. Here again the claims of tradition and modernity are counterposed and the film ends with a freeze frame at a moment of possible reconciliation. Malian director Souleymane Cissé's third film – and sole production so far in the 1980s – *Finyé*, is the first to look seriously at the workings of power in an African society under military rule. Its young student heroes live in a recognisably modern world, marked by the clash of generations, a frustrated anger when confronted by evidence of corruption and a mix of betrayal and commitment when their solidarity is tested. Though the bulk of the film is shot with a close and precisely focused realism, its protagonists are placed in a context of traditional African beliefs and values in a style which shifts effortlessly into moments of literal unreality.

Finyé, directed by Souleymane Cissé.

In the 1980s the established traditions and styles of West African filmmaking have received a challenge from the cinemas of Portuguese-speaking Africa. Two features from Angola underline the potential of a

style of film-making rooted in almost ten years of documentary practice and in a very conscious concern to redefine the social function of cinema in an emerging African society. Both films base their structures on the patterns and rhythms of oral story-telling techniques, so as to reach a popular audience for whom a cinema of social and political awareness is inevitably quite novel after the long years of colonial rule. Both were shot in black and white, *Memoria de um dia* opening with a selection of photographic images of colonial rule, set against a quietly lyrical, meditative text. It contains depictions of the customary range of aggressions by the coloniser – beatings, forced labour, torture – but these are presented through simple re-enactments performed by ordinary peasants from the region concerned. These scenes are illuminated by the direct testimony of witnesses who relate in personal, localised terms the history of the recent past (naming the colonial aggressors and their victims). To bind the film together Orlando Fortunato uses the figure of an old peasant who moves ceaselessly through the landscape of oppression, eventually becoming the mute witness of the tragic aftermath of a 1960 massacre of Agostinho Neto's supporters.

The concern with a people's history and with using cinema to demonstrate truths about the past to a knowledgeable but unsophisticated audience is shown too in Rui Duarte's *Nelisita*. This takes the form of a fable dealing with the last two families left alive in a time of drought. One man discovers a fantastic store of food in a warehouse guarded by mysterious 'ghosts' (easily recognisable by their dark glasses). Eventually he and his companion are captured and their families turned into 'ghosts' as well, though the oppressors' greed causes them to leave alive one of the women who is pregnant (so they can capture her son too). But the boy, Nelisita, grows instantly to manhood, survives all the tests and trials to which he is submitted, and turns the tables on the families' tormentors. This simple fable – again presented without the need for elaborate props or sophisticated acting – is commented on at intervals by the story-tellers, depicted as sitting among the players and representatives of the audience. Though in itself quite simple, this narrative device points to the subtle rethinking of the relation of film to audience which underlies current Angolan film practice. While one path for African cinema in the 1980s – exemplified by the Moscow-trained Cissé – leads to a greater fluency and mastery of cinema in a largely traditional form, the Angolan work points to a quite different potential, that deriving from a rethinking so as to give African cinema a new social role and relation to its audience.

'XALA' AND THE CURSE OF NEO-COLONIALISM

REFLECTIONS ON A REALIST PROJECT
BY GERRY TURVEY

...a committed cinema is useful and educational. It is useful because it nourishes the mind and raises an awareness in people. It is educational because it teaches them...a way of looking at their future and looking at their own lives. For us film-makers, it was thus necessary to become political, to become involved in a struggle against all the ills of man...all the things we have inherited from the colonial and neo-colonial system.[1]

... The first demand of the African public is to see heroes, whether negative or positive, who represent them.... African cinema...[can play] an educational role, a role in bringing to consciousness African realities and' problems...[and it] must find a form of expression as strong as the use of mimesis.[2]

It's always more interesting, closer to the people, if you make a film of this genre [i.e. a fiction film], because they feel more concerned....[I] make a fiction film so that the spectators can become more and more conscious of their role.... The history I wanted to explain required a more profound analysis and I couldn't do that in a simple story of heroism...for me the cinema is a discovery on every level.[3]

[1] Ousmane Sembène, Senegalese director of *Xala* (1974), quoted by Françoise Pfaff, 'Three faces of Africa: Women in Xala' *Jump Cut*, July 1982, no 27, p 80.

[2] Samba Félix N'Diaye, a younger Senegalese contemporary of Sembène, 'Interview', *Framework*, Autumn 1979, no 11, p 19.

[3] Souleymane Cissé (Mali), 'Interview, *Framework*, Autumn 1979, no 11, p 17.

THIS, ADMITTEDLY SELECTIVE, sampling of recent interviews indicates several things about approaches to film-making in the New African Cinema. First, there is an acute concern with the relationship between films and the socio-political world within which they are being made and, whatever the status of this issue in Western academic film study, these practitioners assume the possibility of establishing a meaningful connection between films and their 'referent' in the world of social reality which will allow them to 'make sense' of it for their African audiences. Secondly, films are conceived of as supplying knowledge, promoting consciousness and as having an educational role or as containing a *cognitive* dimension whereby they can facilitate an understanding of African life and history. Finally, these directors indicate their search for some 'form of expression' which will bear a significant relation to reality and which will carry out their broader 'educational' project. Discussion of such artistic forms has long been the concern of theories of realism and these I believe are still relevant to consideration of an African film like *Xala*.

The dominant discourses of the New African Cinema concern African

people, civilisations, realities and problems, and have begun to challenge the degraded accounts offered in the dominant commercial cinema which have disparaged African life and culture right through from the early Tarzan adventures to more recent films like *The Wild Geese*. These latter films, stemming from the industries of Hollywood and Europe, have flooded Africa because of the Western stranglehold on distribution in the continent. Further, the new film-makers' offensive has begun to contradict those mystifying accounts of African social life and history sustained by the racist ideologies of the colonial and imperialist West which underpin both mainstream cinema and allegedly 'objective' historical and anthropological research. Finally, the films offer to challenge the appropriation of Western culture and ideologies by the non-democratic elites which have come to power in several modern African states. This latter issue is, in fact, the central subject matter of *Xala*, which conducts a biting critique of the Euro-centredness of the new black bourgeoisie.

Clearly these film-makers are embarked upon the project of creating a profoundly political cinema but, equally clearly, such a project is fraught with danger and it is sad to record that several of their films have had to depend upon Western art-cinema circuits and international festivals for their public presentations. Sembène has pointed out how interference operates at two levels in Senegal. First comes the official censor with responsibility for judging a film and reporting on it to the prime minister but then the politically decisive group drawn from the ruling party intervene so that, despite the nationalisation of distribution, 'the control exercised by the bourgeoisie over film is even stronger than in colonial times'[4]. As a consequence, his 1977 film *Ceddo* remained banned for religious reasons and *Xala* was released in Senegal only after cuts in eleven sequences. Thus African film-makers are often denied access to the African audiences they try to speak *for* and whom they dearly wish to enlighten. A similar situation existed in Italy after World War II when the neo-realists were also constructing a populist cinema addressing the problems of contemporary life in the face of official disfavour and where exhibition at home had to be sponsored by success overseas.

However, I now want to focus attention on *Xala* to examine exactly *how* its realist cinematic discourse challenges dominant social ideologies but, to do this, the concept of realism I am proposing must be clarified. I take Georg Lukács and Raymond Williams to be the most important Marxist writers on this subject, although, in the long run, I prefer the work of the latter because of its greater conceptual flexibility and its more precise historical analyses. Consequently, I intend to build upon his work below because I feel one of the major shortcomings of recent cultural study has been its incessant search for ever more novel and sophisticated theoretical formulations at the expense of the analysis of concrete cases in specific circumstances. Thus *Xala* is offered here as a particular 'case study' in the application of realist concepts drawn from within the Marxist tradition.

Wiliams' account of realism is useful because he places it within an ongoing historical process wherein it is both 'a particular artistic

[4] Ulrich Gregor, 'Interview with Ousmane Sembène', *Framework*, Spring 1978, no 7/8, p 37.

method' and 'a particular attitude towards what is called reality'[5] and where the 'methods and intentions are highly variable and have always to be taken to specific social and historical analyses'[6]. The crucial moment for the development of realism as 'a whole form' came with the bourgeois drama of the eighteenth century when the realist intention developed the defining characteristics of the form which, I would maintain, subsequent artistic practices such as film have been able to extend. Williams suggests that one of these characteristics has been 'a conscious movement towards social extension'[7]. Thus, initially, the rising bourgeoisie placed itself, rather than the aristocracy, at the centre of dramatic attention. Late in the nineteenth century the working class emerged as major dramatic protagonists although it was not until the 1930s that British working class novelists began to appear and to place their peers at the centre of a narrative. However, this process of social extension has not ceased and the New African Cinema is today engaged in bringing other, previously marginalised, social groups into the mainstream of realist narrative. In this major move it has been black Africans whose lives have been drawn into representation – as when the businessman El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye becomes the central protagonist of *Xala* and the narrative trajectory of the film follows his marital and business failures. The white men, by contrast, are reduced to secondary presences in the story although their role as 'the power behind the throne' still remains important in the film's political analysis. This foregrounding of non-white characters provides a welcome source of identification for black audiences, as Félix N'Diaye claims, but also provides a salutary lesson in respect towards other cultures for white ones. Yet, just as the presence of the working class in major literary forms must be related to the emergence of powerful European labour and socialist movements, so the dominating presence of black characters in these recent films has to be identified with the liberation movements of contemporary Africa.

Williams' second defining characteristic of the realist form is 'a movement towards the siting of actions in the present, to making actions contemporary'.[8] I would add that some realist narratives like Renoir's 1937 film *La Marseillaise*, Visconti's *Senso* of 1954 and Sembène's *Ceddo* of 1977 also embrace an historical dimension with the express purpose of 'making sense' of the present. *Xala*, however, is firmly located in a present-day African state and provides a close study of the new society established there. Its critique is brilliantly initiated in the pre-credit sequence where the contrapuntal relationship set up between the image and sound bands lays out the terms of its general analysis with brevity and clarity. A voice begins to make a speech in French:

Never before has an African been President of our Chamber of Commerce.
... We must control our industry and commerce, our culture and our destiny. We must show our people that we are as capable as any other country. We are businessmen. ... Our struggle for independence is over. This is an historic day. It is a victory for our people. Our people are now governed by their own people in the interests of all the people.[9]

[5] Raymond Williams, 'A Lecture on Realism', *Screen* Spring 1977, vol 18, no 1, p 61.

[6] ibid, p 73.

[7] ibid, p 63.

[8] ibid.

[9] Quotations taken from the sub-titles of the film may not translate all the original speeches.

At the same time black men in local costume are seen to run up the steps of the Chamber of Commerce and enter a room where white men are sitting at a table. The new President gestures for his standing colleagues to remove French statuary and then indicates the whites should leave. Thus far image and sound have coincided but the former now begins to provide an ironic commentary on the latter for, once the new leaders have waved to the celebrating-people, black policemen arrive apparently escorting one of the Frenchmen away until, unexpectedly, *he* directs them to move back the crowd (just as he later directs the operation transporting beggars into the countryside). The other demoted whites reappear laden with cases while the soundtrack continues with:

'We have chosen Socialism. The only true Socialism. African Socialism. Socialism with a human face. We have achieved independence'.

The black members are now sitting at the table wearing dark, Western suits whilst the President, hereafter a rather comic figure in tail coat and wing collar, is pompously placing his own photograph on the wall to sycophantic applause. The Frenchmen enter the room, hand each man a case full of bank notes and then stand quietly by. Here pantomime ceases and the President, speaking for himself, proclaims:

... *our revolution has not been in vain. Our presence in this Chamber of Commerce has been approved by our leader, the father of our nation. We must work together in solidarity. Our enemies have not given up.*

The importance and subtlety of Sembène's *mise-en-scène* becomes apparent at this point for the President is filmed with a Frenchman behind his shoulder whose presence contradicts the claim to revolutionary independence and, behind the President's head, is a map of Africa divided into nation states which denies any broader notions of pan-African solidarity. El Hadji's first speech is also shot against this map although the film follows his progress towards its own pan-African politics.

The Chamber of Commerce and its members provide a metaphor for the modern Senegalese state, its President and leaders because, although no specific society is named (thus allowing the film to take on a generality of reference), it is clearly filmed in the Senegalese capital of Dakar and specific references are made to that city. More provocatively, the political leader who brought Senegal to independence and who was still first President when *Xala* was made, was Leopold Senghor, the founder of the African Socialism parodied in the opening speech.[10] This sequence provides a condensed account of the liberation period; the political developments caricatured there have their origin in recent Senegalese history because, since independence in 1960, the country has remained economically dependent on France and open to French influence. Most imports come from, and most exports go, there. The main groundnut crop has been subsidised by France and funds for capital investment and development have come from French sources.

[10] Senghor also coined the term *négritude* which gets spoofed later in the film.

French employees in the former colonial service were retained and, culturally, Senegal has had no national language press but instead a French dominated radio, French television programmes, feature films and printed material. Senghor's justification for this was a wish to avoid 'cut-price Africanisation', but the gap between his ideas and his practice was such that the former prophet of African Socialism came to claim nationalisation was an outdated way of achieving socialism and to encourage rapid industrialisation of the country by foreigners.

The film's focus on contemporary neo-colonialism is clearly established but precisely how that account is articulated can be indicated by drawing upon Lukács's distinctions between description and narration, naturalism and realism.[11] For Lukács the active authoring of a text was important but would prove less effective for art's cognitive project if it were a naturalist description of surface appearances rather than a realist narrative attempting to identify the fundamental social forces at work in society. A comparison between Sembène's first short film *Borom Serret* (1963) and *Xala* (1974) reveals an increase in his ability to comprehend the complexity of Senegalese social life; between the two films, he accomplishes a movement similar to that negotiated by Visconti in post-war Italy when he passed 'beyond neo-realism and towards realism'.[12] In the late '40s the strategies of the neo-realist directors had led to the impasse of an observational cinema whose exposés were based on a 'seeing-is-believing' principle which lacked analysis of, for example, the 'causes' of poverty in *Bicycle Thieves* (d. de Sica, 1948), whereas in *Senso* Visconti attempted to move film form towards a deeper socio-political analysis.

Borom Serret is very close to *Bicycle Thieves* for both deal with poverty, lack of employment and the problems which ensue from the loss of an important piece of equipment—a cart and a bicycle. In common with neo-realism, Sembène's early films use non-professional actors, location settings and the local language, Wolof. In *Borom Serret* the camera concentrates on the life of the streets while the film is organised as a series of loosely connected episodes in the everyday life of a poor cart driver. This descriptive naturalism contrasts with the narration in *Xala* where the focus is on a moment of crisis which brings various social contradictions to the surface. Thus, for example, in *Borom Serret* one badly disabled beggar is casually encountered whereas *Xala* is structured around the confrontation between a power-holding business elite and the mass of dispossessed beggars. The two films' different formal strategies may be demonstrated by an examination of their contrasting uses of a common image—a policeman who puts his boot over an object a poorer man wishes to pick up. In *Borom Serret* this remains just one of the day's incidents and provides evidence of how oppressive an individual policeman can be towards a more disadvantaged person, whereas in *Xala* the police become agents of social control participating in a *system* of economic and political power. Their repressive behaviour is woven into the narrative to become itself a systematic assault on the poor, so that they first disperse the crowds celebrating 'independence', next move the

[11] See Georg Lukács, 'Narrate and Describe', *Writer and Critic*, London, Merlin, 1978; Raymond Williams, *Keywords*, Fontana, 1976.

[12] See Mario Cannella, 'Ideology and Aesthetic Hypotheses in the Criticism of Neo-Realism', *Screen*, vol 14 no 4, Winter 1973/4, p 5-60.

crowd of beggars away from El Hadji's wedding celebration (one police-
man stepping on coins scattered for charity) and later transport these
same beggars into the country and away from El Hadji's warehouse. He
has asked, 'Can't we get rid of this human rubbish?' and the President
has moved them as 'bad for tourism'. Later still, on instructions from the
Chamber, police confiscate El Hadji's goods, close his premises and take
his car. Their final appearance, however, provides a significant contrast:
this time their control function is contradicted and they are turned away
by the emerging 'alliance' between El Hadji, his first wife, his daughter
and the returned beggars. However, by this stage the film has indicated
how authoritarian political structures will be challenged.

Perhaps naturalist films precede realist ones because radical film-
makers must learn to *see* their own society clearly before being able to
analyse its problems. Thus, the New African Cinema is having to
confront not only the commercial cinema's 'ways of seeing' but also to
generate original cinematic contents and forms which will probe their
own social realities. Sembène and his colleagues are doing this in terms
of a *contrast* to that dominant cinema's misperceptions, ideological
evasions and formal strategies. At this general level their project appears
to have much in common with other naturalist and realist moments in
film history wherein the illusionism and escapism of commercial film-
making has been challenged by an attempt to look closely at the lives of
the 'cinematically neglected'. British documentaries in the '30s, the
French films of Jean Renoir around 1936, Italian neo-realism, the New
Latin American Cinema since the '60s and the contemporary New
African Cinema have all been attempts to generate alternative texts to
'the classic Hollywood film'. Interestingly, there are tenuous historical
links between these moments because both British documentary and
Renoir's films fed into neo-realism, while the practice of the latter
proved exemplary for the Cubans of the Latin American Cinema and
similarities clearly exist between neo-realism and early Sembène.
Furthermore, each of these attempts to examine society seems to have
been promoted by economic and political crises – for example, Britain's
depression in the '30s or the period of the Popular Front in France. Both
Italy and Senegal have shared the experience of being post-liberation
societies wherein a new cultural complex has been under construction so
that, alongside new films, there was the development of a new literature.
In Senegal, Sembène has been an important figure here too.

Xala, therefore, moves beyond surface description to adopt a realist
approach but, in doing this, it deploys a particular strategy which I shall
call 'narrative-as-parable'[13] for, although at one level the film tells a story
about the onset of impotence in a mature, Westernised black man, at
another it provides us with a cautionary tale about African business
corruption and, at another level still, it becomes a critique of Senegalese
political life. The condensation of events in the pre-credit sequence is
hardly naturalistic but it does indicate the connivance of newly estab-
lished black elites in neo-colonialist relationships. Further, the aban-
donment of naturalism allows items in the 'parable' to take on a
significance beyond their status as simple objects. Thus the money-

[13] I was pleased to see
Françoise Pfaff, op
cit, also applied the
term 'parable' to the
film.

Figures in the parable: the black attache cases of the Chamber of Commerce.

filled, black attaché cases accompany Chamber members whenever they are engaged in business providing a reference to their role as the bribed accomplices of imperialism. El Hadji's case is taken away from him when his Chamber membership is withdrawn. Among the objects then returned to him is a fetish provided by a *marabout* as a cure for his *xala* or curse. When this token of traditional Africa is laughed at by the others, he turns the implied criticism of his 'backwardness' against them by stating that 'this is a real fetish but you only believe in technical fetishism' – an accusation which associates the original banknotes with fetishistic behaviour. The thief who replaces him in the Chamber is then handed the case-of-office (and subordination). Perhaps this use of 'parable' relates to Sembène's own self-definition as a modern *griot*, the 'man of learning and common sense who is the historian, the raconteur, the living news and the conscience of his people'[14]. But his assumption of this traditional role has been accompanied by the adoption, extension and reinvigoration of the Western realist form identified by Williams – one example of Sembène's principled decision to draw on whatever of value the West has to offer Africa.

Williams's third defining characteristic of realism is 'an emphasis on secular action . . . [wherein] a human action is played through in specifically human terms'[15] rather than given a religious dimension. This feature he relates to the development of rationalism, the scientific attitude and historical attitudes to society in the period when the realist form was developed. Sembène, as an atheist and a Marxist, is an inheritor of this intellectual current but here some of the historical arguments of CLR James, the West Indian Marxist, appear to be relevant. His thesis is that Western civilisation has entered a state of acute crisis but that the Soviet Union, India and China and, later still, the Gold Coast have broken away to take control of their own futures. The last provoked a particularly rapid and powerful revolutionary

[14] Quoted in Françoise Pfaff, op cit, p 31.

[15] Raymond Williams, 'A Lecture on Realism', op cit, p 64.

[16] CLR James, '...Always out of Africa', *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution*, London, Allison and Busby, 1977, p 219.

[17] Quoted in Ulrich Gregor, op cit, p 37.

[18] Quoted in Françoise Pfaff, op cit, p 29.

[19] ibid. Several commentators on Sembène have underlined the importance he attributes to certain female characters in both his novels and films.

[20] CLR James, 'Towards the Seventh: The Pan-African Congress – Past Present and Future', *At the Rendezvous of Victory*, London, Allison and Busby, 1984, p 250.

[21] Raymond Williams, 'Realism and the Contemporary Novel', *The Long Revolution*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1961, p 278.

[22] Over which looms Georg Lukács, *Studies in European Realism*, London, Merlin, 1978.

movement for, within ten years of the founding of Ghana in 1957, some 40 new African states encompassing a hundred million people had been founded. Furthermore, James argues, statesmen from these under-developed countries have begun to shape world civilisation although the contributions of Lenin, Gandhi, Mao Tse-tung and Nkrumah have built upon ideas and traditions which were initially developed in the West, especially Marxism. Similarly, James suggests, the socialist develop-ment of cooperative villages by Nyerere in Tanzania has not only been a creative response to African needs but also 'corresponds with, and indeed carries further, the highest stages so far reached by Western political thought'.[16] This adaptation of Western ideas for African purposes characterises Sembène's own thinking when he declares that:

The civilization of the Christian West must be examined to see what it has produced upon which one could build further. The concept of democracy for example. The forms of life of our fathers and grandfathers are of no use to our sons. We must produce a synthesis of the two.[17]

For James, the African solution would in turn provide Western socialist movements themselves with the means to emancipate *all* modern society from oppression and decline.

Sembène's position is represented in *Xala* by El Hadji's eldest daughter Rama who, he states, 'is like a step forward in a society which must find a synthesis'[18]. Thus, her figuration in the text presents her in both Europeanised clothing and adaptations of traditional African wear. She is a student with intellectual concerns whose room is full of the books which would find no place in the lives of her father's wives and is decorated with pictures of fighters for African freedom. She uses both the French language of the educated elite and Wolof, the language of Senegal's poor. She challenges both her mother's passive acceptance of the Moslem wife's traditional role and her father's involvement with contemporary neo-colonialism. Importantly she is linked to pan-Africanism when, in argument with her father, Sembène's *mise-en-scène* associates her with a map of Africa undivided by national boundaries whose purple colouring is echoed in her dress. In many ways, therefore, Rama represents Africa's way forward. As Sembène has explained:

Africa can't develop without the participation of its women. Our culture used to relegate women to just a minor role. Now women are starting to take a very active part in society.[19]

Similarly, James admits that African men 'constitute an elite in relation to women, and women have got a capacity, which men have got to learn'.[20]

Realism's secular emphasis was particularly evident in the mature form of the nineteenth century realist novel, wherein 'every aspect of personal life is radically effected by the quality of the general life'.[21] However, in his account of the twentieth century novel[22], Williams suggests that where in the Soviet Union earlier definitions of realism had

been extended into 'socialist realism', in the West there had developed 'a formal gap in modern fiction'[23] which made it incapable of understanding the relationship between individuals and society. Thus the novel had polarised 'into two separate traditions, the "social" novel and the "personal" novel'.[24]

This can perhaps be understood by extending James's thesis of the crisis in Western civilisation to suggest that it has rendered Western cultural forms incapable of comprehending the totality of individual and social experience. The task of engaging in this deeper social analysis has therefore shifted to newer societies where progress is still a possibility. This indicates why the narrative of *Xala* has managed to return the personal and the social to each other in a new synthesis. El Hadji's impotence could have led the film to degenerate into the cinematic equivalent of Williams's 'fiction of special pleading', a sub-category of the personal novel which concentrates on the problems of an isolated individual. The latter has been the destination of many films in the European art cinema tradition, and while *Xala* could have emphasised the psychological *angst* experienced by El Hadji, it does not. Instead, the origin of his personal problem is located in the economic and political corruption of the film's African state.

Put simplistically, El Hadji is rendered impotent because of his increasing absorption into a Europeanised way of life. This has two aspects. On the one hand it is represented by his movement away from the African masses, contact with whom is suppressed by the intervention of the police. Nevertheless, at the end of the film, we learn that the *xala* has been imposed by a figure from these masses, the blind beggar, and it is only lifted when El Hadji begins to resume contact with them. On the other hand, his movement towards things European is indicated in the succession of his wives. Just as the cases full of money indicate how he and his fellow businessmen have sold out to Europe, so the celebration of his third marriage will seal his rapprochement with Europe-in-Africa. Adja, his first wife, wears traditional clothing and head gear and claims her traditional rights and duties. Oumi, his second wife, is first dressed in the Western style with a black, shoulder revealing dress, dark glasses and a wig; she is a parody figure characterised by her 'possessive individualism' with its emphasis on money and Western consumer goods. The third wife, N'Goni, is also associated with material possessions but, in her white wedding dress and veil, is one step closer to Europe. She lacks Adja's clearly defined status and is reduced to being a sex object both by the salacious talk of the friends who offer El Hadji aphrodisiacs before his 'first night' and in the way the film presents her. As the camera voyeuristically watches her being undressed on her wedding night, the viewer is made aware of the objectification of her naked body by its duplication in the photograph of another unclothed African woman on the bedroom wall behind her. Later, the lower half of her body is naked in the foreground of the shots in which El Hadji fails to consummate his marriage and effect a wholehearted commitment to an African facsimile of European 'glamour'. This moment represents the beginning of his return to Africa – achieving his personal salvation

[23] Raymond Williams, 'Realism and the Contemporary Novel', op cit, p 277.

[24] ibid, p 280.

'Typical characters': top, first wife Adja in traditional clothing and second wife Oumi in Western style. Below, El Hadji with his third wife N'Goni in European wedding dress.

becomes a matter of finding his way back to the true African revolution.

Another aspect of the relation between the personal and the social is developed in the film's treatment of women. As a consequence of the actresses' physical appearances and the distinctiveness of their performances, these characters appear intensely present in their own individuality – but they also take on a representative function within the narrative. As 'typical characters'[25] the three older and three younger women can be related in a variety of ways. Two of the older ones, Adja and N'Goni's mother (who expects El Hadji to straddle a pestle and mortar before his wedding night), represent traditional Africa. Oumi and N'Goni represent two generations of African women who have been

25 'Typical characters in typical situations' is a key formulation which has long figured in Marxist debates on realism.

drawn to Europeanism. El Hadji's young secretary, as a working woman, contrasts with the wives' traditional dependence on a man and N'Goni, El Hadji's third wife, contrasts sharply with his daughter, Rama, her contemporary, insofar as one represents the problem posed by the film – continued subordination to Europe – and the other its solution.

Williams argued that, to succeed, 'the realist novel needs, obviously, a genuine community: a community of persons linked...by many, interlocking kinds [of relationship]....It is obviously difficult, in the twentieth century, to find a community of this sort'.[26] *Xala*'s achievement in once more reconciling the personal and social springs from a society engaged in creating its own identity – a black community – in the wake of anti-colonial liberation movements. Nevertheless, the relationship between realism and social crisis is also evident here, for the film itself demonstrates that such a community is by no means assured in the new African states. Similarly, the wider community promised by pan-Africanism, although it too has yet to be achieved, is, nevertheless, a living political aspiration which can motivate the cultural work of a filmmaker like Sembène or an activist like James.

The fourth and final characteristic of realism is that it may be 'consciously interpretative in relation to a particular viewpoint' rather than offering an event for 'mere empathy'.[27] *Borom Serret* evidences only the latter because its cart driver is defeated from the outset – 'We'll have to wait for God's mercy', he says, and 'All that's left is for me to die'. The film becomes an exercise in miserabilism and limits itself to sympathising with the unfortunate life of the urban poor. This approach is avoided by *Xala*'s sharper political analysis.[28] The many successful struggles for African *political* independence exposed the more fundamental issues of continued neo-colonial *economic* dependency and the underdeveloped politics of pan-African federalism. The latter was placed on the agenda in the opening moment of the liberation phase when Nkrumah proposed a United States of Africa and Senegal itself was caught up in the enthusiasm for this in its early, short-lived attempt at federation with Soudan (now Mali). The film takes up these issues, focusing the question of neo-colonial economic dependency on the character of El Hadji. Like the heroes of 'socialist realism', he undergoes a change during the course of the narrative whereby he gains greater self-consciousness and fresh political insight.

The latter is evident in his final appearance in the Chamber of Commerce: El Hadji, like the African bourgeoisie in general, is a businessman engaged primarily in the import-export trade. As he explains: 'I import directly from Europe....I deal with the Common Market countries' and his warehouse contains the boxes of Coca Cola and other non-essential goods which will contribute nothing to solving his country's more pressing problems of hunger and agricultural underdevelopment for, as he is told, it is rice and tomatoes that are most needed. El Hadji is corrupt, like the other members of the elite, but, unlike them, he comes to feel guilty about this. His impotence is an expression of this guilt but its onset is already a first step in its resolution

[26] Raymond Williams, 'Realism and the Contemporary Novel', op cit, p 286.

[27] Raymond Williams, 'A Lecture on Realism', op cit, p 68.

[28] Georg Lukács touches on similar issues in his discussion of 'perspective' in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, London, Merlin, 1979.

29 In a reverse movement the thief who replaces him has already exchanged his brown rags for a dark suit. -

so that, even before denouncing his colleagues, he has begun to move towards the people, as in his plans to develop the native sectors with neighbourhood shops. Thus when summoned to the final meeting, he wears a fawn suit which is closer than his earlier dark one to the coloration of African dress.[29] At this meeting he is correctly accused of embezzling supplies from the National Food Bank by Kebe, who has earlier been seen taking a fifteen per cent cash commission as a bribe in a tourism deal. His 'defence' exposes the Chamber members' true situation: 'What are we but petty officials and subcontractors? What do we do but redistribute the leftovers? We're the scum of the business world'. Significantly, throughout this scene Sembène regularly cuts to the impassive Frenchman, often viewed in his position of 'authority' behind the President. After accusing the others of signing bad cheques and trafficking in rice and the drought, El Hadji concludes, 'We've all embezzled goods destined for the needy. The army and even the police are on our payroll .... Democracy, equality and justice are words we don't know the meaning of'. Halfway through this scene he demonstrates his new allegiance by asking permission to speak in Wolof. The request is refused but this incident reveals that the father has learned from his daughter – replicating the moment in his office where he reproached Rama for speaking in Wolof instead of the language of the colonial power. But El Hadji also learns from the people, unlike the hero of the early Soviet Socialist Realist film *Chapayev* (1934), who learns only from his political commissar.

The crowd of dispossessed beggars is very important to the film's social analysis. They are constantly present – outside the wedding celebrations or near El Hadji's office – until they finally invade the domestic interior of his home. They constitute the antithesis of the elite because they have been deprived of their birth-right by that elite. The blind beggar claims to be El Hadji's cheated half-brother and, although that may be literally true, this is another moment when narrative-as-parable comes to the fore because El Hadji and the black bourgeoisie have robbed them *all*. The blind man reproaches him with, 'You took *our* share of the inheritance. You forged *our* names and *we* were expropriated'. The collective character of this accusation is reinforced by the way Sembène films the man in the midst of a solid block of beggars. Further, the villager robbed of all his community's savings by El Hadji's replacement is sitting among the beggars. Two of these dispossessed men are given voices to inform and explain. One is the blind man whose diagnosis is that under present circumstances, 'prisoners are happier than peasants ... happier than fishermen and workers'. The other is the ex-villager who explains the desperate problems generated by rural drought and poor harvests at an earlier moment of commensality when the beggars share bread and coffee together. They have been cast out by economic dispossession and are also severely physically disabled. Yet the film asserts the positive virtues associated with the community of beggars, particularly as represented in the figures of the blind man, the ex-villager and the young man originally caught up in the police swoop whilst selling *Kaddu*, the only journal available on the streets in Wolof.

The film places the beggars at the opposite pole to that occupied by the corrupt black bourgeoisie, embodiment of what CLR James calls the 'totalitarian type'[30], and charts El Hadji's halting progress towards a greater understanding of their situation and his own.

At his wedding El Hadji scatters coins of charity to the beggars but, after he is dispossessed himself, he moves towards a fuller appreciation of their plight so that, when he takes off his clothes before them to be ritually spat upon, he will undergo a form of rebirth and have his *xala* lifted. The film is formally closed by the removal of this curse but, at another level – and unlike the dominant Hollywood model – its narrative is left open. El Hadji has lost his position in the corrupt national elite and his two Westernised wives – one has returned the wedding presents and the other has driven off with her possessions – but the film ends by presenting a tentative 'alliance' between its progressive elements, the reformed and newly conscious El Hadji, his first wife Adja representing traditional African values, his militant daughter Rama representing change and the Pan-African future and the beggars representing the African people. In 1976, the film's analysis was reiterated in an important speech given by CLR James at the First Congress of All African Writers in Dakar. There he outlined his own agenda for the political tasks of a future Pan-African Congress and emphasised, first, the total failure and redundancy of the nation state and the need to sponsor African federation; secondly, the impediment represented by Westernised African elites and the need to remove them for the benefit of the peasantry; thirdly, the creative capacity of the common people as revealed in Cuba and Vietnam and the need for the educated to recognise their suppressed potential and, finally, the importance of releasing the energies of African women.

I have attempted here to challenge a recent left orthodoxy which declares realism to be either exhausted or irretrievably compromised with bourgeois modes of representation. I feel one task of critical writing is to demonstrate this is not necessarily the case, to identify and encourage progressive realist forms and to develop those critical analyses which can be used to give a radical reading to realist texts, thereby making clear their connection with left politics. The task of criticism is fundamentally a political one and studying the recent development of the realist form in Ousmane Sembène's films may help the politics and cultural practices of contemporary Africa to contribute to a renewed sense of political and cultural direction in the West.

This article resulted from a decision to use *Xala* in a course on 'realism' in the cinema at the Polytechnic of Central London.

87

[30] A term used by James in his analysis of *Moby Dick* in his *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways*, Detroit, Bewick/Ed, 1978, p13.

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FOR A NATIONALIST, REALIST, CRITICAL AND POPULAR CINEMA

BY FERNANDO BIRRI

Translator's Introduction: These two short pieces, which first appeared in an edition of the magazine *Areito* (volume X number 37, 1984) published by the Cuban Cultural Circle of New York, dedicated to the New Latin American Cinema, date from the Fifth Havana Film Festival in December 1983. The authors are both pioneers of the movement looking back over its growth and development. Fernando Birri founded the Film School of the University of Santa Fe in Argentina in the mid-'50s but has now lived and worked for many years in exile in Rome. A painter and poet as well as film-maker, his latest film, a two-hour portrait of the Spanish poet Rafael Alberti at the age of 80, was one of the highlights of the Festival. Julio García Espinosa, a founder member of ICAIC, the Cuban Film Institute, is now its President and Cuban Vice-Minister of Culture. (Michael Chanan)

The new Latin American cinema, which we continue to call 'new' in order to exorcise any possible regression, is now about 25 years old. It was born in Cuba with *El megano* by García Espinosa, Gutiérrez Alea, Alfredo Guevara and José Massip; in Brazil with Nelson Pereira dos Santos; and in Argentina with the Documentary Film School of Santa Fe. Something I always like to remember is that it was born without any kind of, let's say, confabulation between us, but because it was in the air. We can now understand it with great clarity, thanks to something the Italians call *il senno di poi*, that is, the sign that comes afterwards, seeing history through the other end of the telescope. It was born because in that moment, in the middle of the '50s, in different places in Latin America, a generation of film-makers was growing up who wanted to provide a reply to some of the problems of the moment, and who brought with them more questions than answers. They were questions that came from an historical necessity, a necessity in the history of our peoples; in the history of people awakening with great strength to the consciousness of occupying their place in history, a place denied us for so many years, a place which, once and for all, as the title of the beautiful Nicaraguan film has it, is a place of bread and dignity. These two ideas, I believe, explain something of the tension out of which the new Latin American cinema was created and motivated.

When we were born, nothing was clear and resolved; we had no recipes of prefabricated formulae. What we did know was that in some ways this continent was so rich, so complex, so contradictory, so coarse, so exaltant in other ways, that it was a continent that was not reflected in the images produced by the three

major Latin American cinemas, the only ones that existed: the Mexican, the Brazilian and the Argentinian cinemas.

This new cinema was born with two or three keys to comprehension, analysis, interpretation and expression. What were they? I remember that when *Tire dié* came out in 1958, it was accompanied by a short manifesto arguing for a national, realist and critical cinema. These were the three keys which in one way or another tried theoretically to illustrate a concrete formulation, the film that was *Tire dié*. From *Tire dié* we passed to *Los inundados,* which is already a fictional film though with a documentary base — and this is another constant in the new Latin American cinema, that is, the documentary support. A characteristic that has been progressively accentuated is the rupture with traditional genres: with what is traditionally understood by documentary; with what is traditionally understood or understandable as narrative.

Nelson Pereira dos Santos had always worked in narrative cinema. But apart from being the first attempt of this kind at Santa Fe, *Los inundados* was an attempt to achieve a greater diffusion of the film object, to explore the possibility of more extensive communication by the film with its public. And in that sense, the narrative construction has a much greater power of communication, and can embrace a much wider horizon than the documentary. Narrative cinema adds to the three previous keys the new key of the popular. In this way, the theoretical postulate which accompanied our work was the call for a national, realist and critical cinema, but, additionally, it was intrinsically related to a fourth, the popular, which is to say, it tried to interpret, express and communicate with the people.

This is also related to another tendency which the new Latin American cinema has always had, which is its aspiration to being an active cinema. What does this mean? It means that in the last instance it is a cinema which is generated within the reality, becomes concrete on a screen and from this screen returns to reality, aspiring to transform it. This is the fundamental idea. Over the years I have often asked myself what could be a common denominator for the new Latin American cinema. If I had to give a brief definition, I would say that it's a cinema which

corresponds to what I called and continued to call a poetics of the transformation of reality. That's to say, that it generates a creative energy which through cinema aspires to modify the reality upon which it is projected. We applied this concept to documentary as much as narrative, to short as well as medium and long films, and now we're applying it also to television, to which we are now equally dedicating our forces. In this concept of a poetics of the transformation of reality it is necessary, among other things, to have no abyss between life and the screen.

Federico García Lorca once introduced Pablo Neruda very beautifully at the University of Madrid, many years ago, before 1936, when Pablo wasn't yet fully Pablo. I remember that Federico said that Pablo was a poet — and he would have wanted to say this of our cinema — closer to blood than to ink, closer to death than philosophy, and who carried in his blood — and I would say this is true of our celluloid — that grain of madness without which it's not worth living. In short, the cinema that started to be made 25 years ago was a utopia, and now this cinema exists and has a continental dimension. This is an important datum. It is the only cinema in the history of cinema that expresses a continent in all the diversity of its cultural-historical connotations but which, at the same time, belongs to an economic infrastructure which perpetuates its so-called underdevelopment, and which places us face to face with common and shared problems of existence.

In this sense, then, it seems to me that the characterisations we're trying to develop of an active cinema for an active spectator — a spectator who doesn't consume passively as if merely digesting celluloid — also has another aspect: that it's a cinema of and for liberation, for economic, political and cultural liberation, and also the liberation of the image, which is to say, of the imagination. This also seems to me a characteristic of the new Latin American cinema, present in its origins, and course of development, deepening and clarifying with daily practice. And we feel this liberation of the image to be valid in the face of the successive crises through which the new Latin American cinema has passed. It was reflected in the Havana Film Festival in 1981, when we conducted a seminar on cinema and poetic imagination. This cinema,

though it has to do above all with reality and has to intervene in the real in order to transform it, cannot do without the word poetic and the creative energy which the word contains. It is intrinsic in the need to expand our horizons. It is like the tension of an arrow in flight towards a target it has not yet reached. That is the new poetic-political cinema which is being produced in Latin America; and another indication of the crisis that is manifest in this Fifth Havana Festival (1984). Crisis is a word which manifestly some people don't at all like because it means above all change. Certainly, if the change is towards old age, senility, arteriosclerosis, one can understand... if the change is from life to death, obviously this crisis is fatal. But if the crisis is the first cry of the baby at its birth, or the rupture or laceration of an adolescent who is beginning to pose the big questions which perhaps have no answer, the big insoluble questions, then it's very positive because it's a crisis of growth and a crisis of maturation.

MEDITATIONS ON IMPERFECT CINEMA... FIFTEEN YEARS·LATER

BY JULIO GARCÍA ESPINOSA

Some years ago, around 1969, when we finally began to accomplish films that were well-made and coherent, I wanted to do some thinking aloud, with the idea of stimulating an internal discussion about the danger of turning out well-made films which went no further, and didn't develop more substantial changes within existing dramaturgy. As I had always believed that new content requires new forms, I put this analysis into the essay entitled 'For an Imperfect Cinema'[1].

Many people thought it was about making bad films. In truth, the essay allowed people to think this because to some extent there are indeed times when a documentary on what's going on in El Salvador or Guatemala, although badly made, can be more important from a cultural point of

view than a film which is, as we used to say, well-made. But this wasn't the only issue. I have to confess that perhaps we also had a sensation of impotence in the face of large-scale technology, the whole technical development involved in cinema made with lots of resources. But at the basis of the question there was a dilemma: either you tried to make an artistic cinema, estranged from a public which had the potential for substantially changing reality, and these films would then be sent to the cinémathèques and become part of an anthology of great films; or you made films which posed, let's say, the denunciation of a reality disguised by aesthetics, and which finally spoke to our exposed innards. And I have always thought that the spectator ends up not irritated but enjoying the aesthetic pleasure offered by films – I'm really talking about fictional cinema – which denounce particular situations. There are a great number of war films with pretensions of denouncing war which at the same time are great spectacles of

[1] Julio García Espinosa, 'For an Imperfect Cinema', in Michael Chanan (ed), *Twenty-five Years of the New Latin American Cinema*, London, British Film Institute and Channel 4, 1983, pp 28-33.

war; and in the end the spectacle is what you enjoy about them. So to speak clearly: art is essentially a disinterested activity, but if we're in a phase when we have to express interests, then let's do it openly and not continue to camouflage it. And therefore, if art is substantially a disinterested activity and we're obliged to do it in an interested way, it becomes an imperfect art. In essence, this is how I use the word imperfect. And this I think isn't just an ethical matter, but also aesthetic.

This is what I posed at the end of the '60s, and personally I think it still applies. For myself, if I had the chance of producing cinema, I'd carry on doing it with facts rather than words, and this is the path I'd try to follow. I am inclined to say that we have three key problems. The problem of the addressee: nearly always we make films for an addressee, that's to say, a public, that isn't the one that is participating in the changes, or isn't even potentially able to do so. That's to say, it's a public that has no awareness yet, to whom we address our products, hoping that it will become conscious and participate with those who are making changes. And it has always seemed to me more effective, if this unaware public should become aware, to dedicate our production to those who are indeed struggling, who are indeed in the course of producing changes. I think that by defining this addressee properly, it improves the chances of a much more consequential dramaturgy.

Then there was the question of quality. What exactly is quality? And what is modernity in the cinema? When we talk about life, we can certainly talk about, say, the quality of a city, say Paris. This is not a city which can serve us well as a model for what cities have to be like, neither Paris, nor New York, nor any overdeveloped city. But I might well find the quality of a city like Hanoi much more to the point; I can find in the midst of all the imperfections of a city like Hanoi, more elements of quality in terms of human beings than what we used to think of as the qualities of Paris or New York. I believe it is similar in the case of the qualities of cinema, in relation to contemporaneity and authenticity: that of producing an image without make-up that is nonetheless more attractive. I think that the attitude of going to the realities is what produces modernity and contemporaneity in the cinema. What does it mean for a film to be modern?

Often it's modern because of its photography, or its montage, its rhythm – I mean exactly what gives a film modernity. And I think that the path we're travelling is the search for modernity which goes beyond the theme of the film. And I believe this is a path which has to become ever more consequential.

There are also other problems which greatly affect this search for what I called imperfect cinema – and this includes what I have called the economy of waste, basically created above all by the great countries of developed capitalism, which try to incite us to unnecessary consumption. So much so that in recent meetings with Latin American film-makers, we've seen that the problem is no longer whether we're socialist or capitalist. That's to say, on the one hand are the capitalists and they're able to stay capitalist as long as they consume what is produced by the world centres of capitalism. But when those underdeveloped countries want to produce for themselves as well, then they won't let them be capitalist. And this is a system which carries with it a great waste of resources, of labour power and primary materials. I think that one of the most rigorous means we should use to analyse works of art, in this case of cinema, is the question of up to what point a work of art contributes towards eliminating the culture of waste.

Our countries, that is, the underdeveloped countries, aspire to one day leaving underdevelopment behind; but in spite of planting the idea of a new economic order, these countries cannot aspire to reach the level of the most highly developed countries of the capitalist world. They will never reach this level because this level can only be occupied by so many millions of people in the world. It cannot be an answer for all the inhabitants of the globe. Yet there are people who have suffered great scarcities who think that this is the goal they have to reach. When we talk about a new economic order, we have to accompany it with a new cultural order, of a new position towards a culture which can help to create a mentality that will truly understand what the new economic order means, which is not the artificially high levels of consumption of the developed countries of capitalism. And this is also, to my understanding, part of the idea to which I gave the confusing name of imperfect cinema.

FROM ONE COUNTRY TO THE NEXT

SARAH MONTGOMERY INTERVIEWS COLOMBIAN FILM-MAKER DORA RAMIREZ

Six women in Bogotá, Colombia came together in 1978 as a collective to form Cine-mujer. Since then the group has produced audio-visual material, films and videos on the situation of women, for television as well as for use in and with women's groups. A lot of their early work attended to the process of finding a way of working collectively: questions of rotating or sharing out the administrative chores, fundraising and public relations, as well as those more directly related to film-making itself. In this respect, their experience is common to many of us engaging with the difficulties of what it is to be doing 'feminist' film.

But these women also face difficulties specific to the context in which they are working, such as training, funding and the material processes of film production. In a country where abortion is considered a crime, for example, Cine-mujer's proposal for a film on this subject has met with strong resistance from would-be funding bodies. Though not abandoned, this project has been by-passed by other productions, but even these meet with problems well beyond our own experience.

While not always able to make films on the subjects of its own choice, however, the group is now financially self-supporting. Through the distribution of their work, the hiring out of equipment and further productions, they are now able to pay themselves equal, if low, wages, though there is still often a need to work elsewhere to earn a living and to work in the evenings and on weekends.

As one of the few women's film groups in Latin America, Cine-mujer is of necessity isolated. But in October 1984 Dora Ramírez,

who has been with the group since it began, was selected to participate in a Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange programme. Organised by the ISIS-Geneva collective, seventeen women from fourteen different countries were brought together to explore the theme of Women and Communication. Workshops were held in documentation, graphics, tape-slide, drama and video. As a result, Sarah Montgomery who was running the video workshop[1] with Karen Alexander, met Dora Ramírez. The following is a translated and edited version of their conversations on the experience of feminists and film-makers in Latin America.

Dora Ramírez: The first thing we did when we got together as a group was *A Primera Vista* (*At First Sight*, 1979) about the image of woman in advertising. Then the other two left and we were four. That was when we wanted to write a script together, the four of us, because we felt that that was what collective work meant. We used to talk all the time about the script itself *and* how to solve the structure/organisation of Cine-mujer so it could operate without hierarchies. We spent at least two years discussing this until Patricia came along wanting us to do *Paraíso Artificial* (*Artificial Paradise*, 1980) which was one of her scripts. So we did it, with money borrowed from friends. Then when the film was distributed we gave the money back. The idea was to give it back with a percentage on what we got from

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distribution, but we only got enough back to return what we owed. In other words, we lost money in terms of what we could have made with the money in the bank getting interest.

Sarah Montgomery: *And did the group try to set up its own distribution network at that time with the films you made?*

Yes, we distributed *A Primera Vista* and *Paraíso Artificial* and used to go with the projector to show them when we were asked, which happened quite a lot. We'd like to distribute other films but it's not one of our priorities. Not only because of the bureaucracy involved but because of the enormous expense. We hire out the films for 1,000 pesos – about ten dollars – which is nothing. And quite apart from buying other films and paying rights, postage by air or land in Colombia itself all costs money.

Is video being used a lot in Colombia for those kinds of screenings?

When we made *Carmen Carrascal* about the woman on the coast who makes baskets, we took it for her to see. We couldn't go into the country with the film and the projector, so we asked her to go to the village and see it on Betamax there. It's much easier to get a Betamax to see a film.

*And how did you work with the women in your films? In the case of **Carmen** for example, how did you work out your relationship with the woman who was going to be the 'star' of the film?*

It was beautiful. That's why the film is beautiful. You'll see. We managed to make her feel so confident in us that you can see how her shyness shows through in front of the camera. Also, she laughs at the beginning when she doesn't know what to say. She simply laughs. All of this, which makes the film what it is, we achieved because of the way we related to her, respected her time and respected her space. When she saw it she began to cry and was very moved. We showed it twice and she liked it very much. We were afraid, because when we went to meet her the first time we spent about five days in her house in the mountains taking photos and sound recording. One night, after a bit of rum, she began to sing – that song she sings in the film – when she was a bit crazy. She was saying things that didn't make sense and was like that for about three months. And the song she used to sing at that time is a very powerful, very beautiful song which we'd recorded one night and which we ended up putting in the film, but when we went back to film she said she wasn't going to sing that song ever again. But we'd recorded it and it was so beautiful that we

Carmen Carrascal: 'the height of our whole history . . . because it was something collective'.

98

Filming *Y Su Mamá qué Hace?* (*What Does Your Mother Do?*).

decided to put it in. We had asked her what she wanted to put in the film but not about the song because we were afraid she'd refuse. At one time we'd thought of asking her to Bogotá before the final edit but it was very difficult at that time because, well, it's not like asking *you* to come to an edit. Anyway, the film begins with the song and she was very surprised and began to cry. But she liked it a lot and was very happy with it. Afterwards the film won a prize – it's won more than one – but this one was in money, so we sent her some because we'd agreed in the beginning that we would.

At that time did you hire equipment or have your own?

The film was financed, so with the money that was budgeted to hire a moviola and a tape recorder we had enough to buy them both second hand. It cost the same to hire a tape recorder in Colombia for three months as to buy one in New York, including the air fare of the person who went there to buy it and bring it back. It's the same for filmstock, processing, everything. Everything. And all this is smuggled. To send film for processing there's a whole network organised with air hostesses who go to New York and among Colombian film-makers. If a film-maker is going abroad, everybody knows.

You pay them something and. . . . But you have to film everything and then send it. You could send a little, view it, do a bit more and so on, but it would be a lengthy process and you can't postpone the filming because you're renting the equipment. For example, in *Y Su Mamá qué Hace?* (*What Does Your Mother Do?*, 1981), the dressing gown the protagonist used belonged to Rita's mother. We borrowed it, used it, gave it back, and her mother went away on holiday . . . with the dressing gown. We sent the film to New York and when we got it back saw we needed to film some things again. But we couldn't because of the dressing gown. And then, while we were waiting for Rita's mother to come back, our actress had her hair cut.

And at that time, did you have a place to meet?

No. The equipment was kept at my apartment. Sara and Eulalia who were editing *Carmen* used to work there during the day and in the evening we'd talk, look at the material, go over everything together. After we'd been going for five years we got an office. This has made our work easier and helped in terms of our group's identity, but it's made us more bureaucratic because it turned into an office. Our dream since Cine-mujer began was to have a space with some cushions on the floor where we could sleep,

drink beer, talk, dream, write...but we never imagined that this would become an office where people would pass through the whole time.

For me, the height of our whole history was *Carmen Carrascal* because it was something collective. We worked for two years on the script in every possible way. We had the whole script on cards and used to play, like playing cards, trying out every possibility until we finally came to what the film is. But experience has proved that this can't be. This was a moment, a moment in the group, the moment we were living in Cine-mujer. We didn't have a space, we didn't have an office. The dream was exactly that. But when we got them, then we couldn't work like that again. Do you see? Because by then the situation was different and we were in a professional environment. Understanding this was, for me for example, extremely painful. Understanding that this history *was*. Now we understand that the reality is something else: what it is to pay rent, wages, respond economically to insurance costs.... Before we wanted to produce films and have enough money to eat, but now we're in the world of production and consumption and we have to produce money to survive. We've never stopped doing things for what Cine-mujer is, that 'other' thing which is what we really want to do, deep down, but now it's in a more individualist way. It's been six years and we've seen more clearly what and how we want to do things. So what I want to express and how is very different from Clara, Eulalia, Sara, Patricia or Fanny.

And what about training for women? Are practical workshops something you are able to do?

Not really. We've all learned in practice, watching or helping on shoots when we've had the opportunity. But it's not something we're in a position to do, largely because of the cost. Both the equipment and the maintenance is very expensive, so it's not that easy to say let's run a workshop. Some people get basic training on university short courses, but there are no courses for women only—much less for black women.

Are there other film groups around like yours?

No. There are independent women film-makers, but no groups. Nowadays women are getting into television more, too. They've nearly all made things on the theme of women, telling stories with female protagonists, sometimes fairly strong characters, but not from a particularly feminist perspective.

And do you have the chance to see other films, for example American independents or films made by women in other countries?

No. Only when we travel. Otherwise none, none at all. We have had some exchange with women in Mexico, with another group there also called Cine-mujer, but it's only sometimes. Or someone turns up with a film or tape and we see it. There are sometimes seasons of independent cinema at the cinémathèque but generally there isn't this possibility. And if we were to present a season of films made by women from abroad, we could only do it with the usual films that are already in distribution: German cinema, some Italian films. Not many English films go to Colombia. And as for publications, there's a lot of information in the United States and Europe in a number of magazines, but not much in Colombia. We get publications of all kinds from abroad, feminist publications, but not really on cinema.

You've made tapes on the First and Second Feminist Meetings of Latin American and Caribbean Women in 1981 and 1983. How was the making of those?

The first one was in Bogotá and a month before we decided we wanted to video it. We didn't have any money but we managed to borrow the equipment. One U-matic one-tube camera for three days. Then we got another three-tube one, but they'd only lend it to us with a male camera operator, so he was doing camera.

And how did the participants take to that?

Well, in fact he was Sara's *compañero* so a lot of people knew him already and it was all right. But on the day there was a discussion on lesbianism and everyone was giving personal testimonies, we obviously couldn't go in and cover that. Then in Lima they wouldn't even hire us equipment without operators and they were all men. Not one woman. Now we've got our own equipment and we could do the next meeting in Brazil but it's very ambitious to try and make a tape of a feminist meeting. Really what you do is give a vision of it which, as a document, is very inter-

esting but very difficult to do. And you can never participate in the meeting as a participant. Of the first meeting we've sold about fifteen copies of the video to different countries in Latin America and it has been distributed a lot. We also know there are some pirate copies around. Lots of people have seen it. The second one has been distributed less so far but we've sold some copies too. Feminists are interested in seeing it and discussing it, but the institutions that buy films are not interested because the theme is feminism. And women's groups don't have the money. It's also very expensive to make transfers. We have to get them done abroad. There is the equipment in Colombia to do them but it's very expensive. We have to get them done, even for our work to be seen in other Latin American countries. You see, in Brazil it's PAL[2] and in Columbia and Peru it's NTSC[3] and so on, so these machines which are meant for communication are different from one country to the next. And this makes for *non*-communication.

Y Su Mamá qué Hace? and *Carmen Carrascal* are distributed by CIRCLES, 113, Roman Road, London E2 0HU. Tel: (01) 981 6828.

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[2] 'Phase Alternation Line', the European standard video system.

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[3] The US standard video system, named after the National Television Systems Committee.

A QUESTION OF DIFFERENCE

ROSEMARY BETTERTON REVIEWS 'WOMEN AND FILM' AND 'RE-VISION'

These two books arrive at a time of stocktaking within women's cinema and feminist film criticism. They represent the considerable presence which feminist film theory has come to occupy within film studies, and signal important ways feminism has challenged traditional approaches to the study of cinema. As the title of *Re-Vision* suggests, this is a moment when feminist film critics are looking back over the past decade or so to see where they have come from, a point of definition and explanation as well as an opportunity to map out new directions. But the act of 're-vision' is not merely one of reflection upon the past: it is also a point of intervention, 'of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction'.[1] The 'old text' in this case is both the dominant tradition of cinema itself and the assumptions and omissions of masculine criticism and knowledge. In this sense, both books are concerned with more than 'filling in' a woman's point of view which has been missed out. They want to reconstruct our understanding of cinema, to ask different kinds of questions.

Feminism has made its impact on film in a number of ways. For example, it helped create a new market for the Hollywood 'independent woman's' movie of the '70s[2], has been influential in independent film production in Britain and the United States, and has established itself firmly within the academic discipline of film studies. The benefits for the production and study of cinema are apparent, not least in the development of a new and committed audience for films. But why should feminists be interested in cinema? What are the benefits for feminists of viewing, making and studying films?

That we *are* interested is evident from the numbers of women-oriented and feminist-inspired screenings, day schools and film study courses now available, as well as from the growth of women's involvement in film-making and criticism, all of which make possible the publication of books like *Re-Vision* and *Women and Film*. My own interest in film grew alongside an awareness of the women's movement, so that for me the two are inextricably linked: questions about feminist practice in film have always seemed bound up in a very direct way with the concerns of the wider women's movement. As Ruby Rich suggests, there was an early perception of film as a 'sphere of action'[3] for feminists. Representation has been of crucial concern to feminism: in the double sense of the portrayal of women's struggles in all social spheres, and of our understanding of the ways in which women are constructed in dominant cultural discourses. The study and the making of films offer a means both of analysing oppression and of struggling to find a voice in which women can speak for themselves. The objective, as Ann Kaplan puts it, is to seek a gap 'through which, hopefully, woman can begin to create a discourse, a voice, a place for herself as

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[1] Adrienne Rich, quoted in Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp and Linda Williams (eds), *Re-Vision*, American Film Institute Monograph, Series, vol 3, University Publication of America, 1984, p 1.

[2] Charlotte Brunsdon, 'A Subject for the Seventies', *Screen* September-October 1982, vol 23, nos 3-4, 1982, pp 20-29.

[3] B Ruby Rich, quoted in *Re-Vision*, p 4.

subject'[4]. Or, as the editors of *Re-Vision* argue, 'To claim a temporality, a space, a subjectivity or a look proper to the female is a way of attempting to reclaim a territory and to de-marginalize women.'[5]

As well as being highly productive, both enterprises have been profoundly problematic. It is out of the problems and the debates they engendered that feminist criticism developed during the '70s. Both these books must be seen as emerging from, and addressing themselves to, feminist debates around representation. But while *Women and Film* and *Re-Vision* share a common set of concerns about the position of women as objects, as makers, and above all as spectators, of film, they are rather different kinds of book. Ann Kaplan's comes from her own teaching over ten years on courses about women and film, and represents a desire to synthesise current ideas in feminist film theory and make them accessible for a readership primarily of teachers and students: it includes definitions of terms and concepts currently employed in film studies, filmographies and an appendix specifically for teachers. Kaplan's strategy is to demonstrate feminist film criticism 'in action' by making detailed analyses of specific films. The book is divided into two sections, the first of which focuses on four Hollywood films: *Camille* (1936), *Blonde Venus* (1932), *Lady from Shanghai* (1946) and *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* (1977). Taking theories of gendered spectatorship as her starting point, Kaplan's purpose is to show how in these films 'the dominating male gaze relegates women to absence, silence and marginality, using a series of increasingly vicious mechanisms'.[6] The second and longer section of the book deals with the independent feminist film, and aims to represent the broad strategies and tendencies within women's film-making of the 1970s and 1980s. This includes discussion of European film-makers Marguerite Duras and Margarethe von Trotta, the experimental avant-garde films of Yvonne Rainer, some American realist documentary films, avant-garde theory films from Britain and one Third World film by Cuban director Sara Gomez.

Women and Film has been criticised for its omissions – for example its scanty coverage of black and lesbian film-making – and I will take up some of those points below.[7] But, despite some limitations in choice of films, the book does offer readers new to the area access to ideas and

debates in current feminist film criticism. This makes it particularly useful for teachers anxious to find suitable material for student reading in a field where much recent work is still difficult and obscure to non-specialists. Kaplan's awareness of the problems of teaching is consequently one of the book's strengths. It is perhaps also a source of weakness: those of us who teach are familiar with the desire to encapsulate and resolve awkward and contradictory arguments for the sake of clarity, but this can sometimes absorb and disguise real tensions which should perhaps be left more uncomfortably apparent. This tendency to skate over conflicts is evident, for instance, in Kaplan's rejection of a sociological approach as inadequate to the project of feminist film analysis: she seems to suggest that such work has been superseded by newer ideas, while it is actually a matter of ongoing debate.

In putting together essays by a number of different writers, the editors of *Re-Vision* have adopted a rather different strategy, one which makes the book representative of a wider range of approaches within feminist film criticism – but at the same time probably more difficult for a first-time reader. It brings together four papers – by Mary Ann Doane, Linda Williams, Kaja Silverman and Teresa de Lauretis – originally presented at a conference on 'Cinema Histories, Cinema Practices' held in California in May 1981, with essays by Christine Gledhill, Judith Mayne and B Ruby Rich, previously published elsewhere.[8] The anthology therefore represents several directions in recent feminist film

[4] E Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*, London, Methuen, 1983, p 2.

[5] *Re-Vision*, op cit, p 10.

[6] E Ann Kaplan, op cit, p 5.

[7] See Sarah Halprin, 'Writing in the Margins', *Jump Cut*, no 29, 1984, and B Ruby Rich, 'Cinefeminism and its Discontents', in *American Film*, December 1983, vol IX no 3, pp 68-75.

[8] Christine Gledhill's article, 'Developments in Feminist Film Criticism', originally appeared in *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, vol 3 no 4, 1978; Judith Mayne's 'The Woman at the Keyhole: Women's Cinema and Feminist Criticism' in *New German Critique* no 23, Spring-Summer 1981; and B Ruby Rich's 'From Repressive Tolerance to Erotic Liberation' in *Jump Cut* nos 24-25, March 1981.

criticism, and offers a useful overview of current debates. While editors Doane, Mellencamp and Williams make their own position clear – in their introduction they endorse a semiotic and psychoanalytic approach – they are also extremely careful to acknowledge other viewpoints. In particular, Christine Gledhill's 1978 article 'Developments in Feminist Film Criticism' is reprinted here with some 'Afterthoughts' which extend her criticisms of psychoanalysis in feminist film theory. The desire to represent different voices in current criticism makes *Re-Vision* of particular interest to those of us who have struggled at a distance to follow the debates of the past few years. It is clearly not intended to be an introductory book in the way *Women and Film* is: but it does offer a sometimes difficult, often rewarding and – depending on your viewpoint – occasionally infuriating access to recent feminist film theory.

The articles in *Re-Vision* focus mainly on analyses of specific films or genres and, as in Ann Kaplan's book, examples are taken from both mainstream and independent cinema: thus, Mary Ann Doane writes on 'The "Woman's Film": Possession and Address' and Linda Williams on horror movies in 'When the Woman Looks'. As the titles of their papers suggest, both Doane and Williams are concerned with the place of woman as spectator in certain mainstream genres; a questioning of the position of the feminine subject is also central in Teresa de Lauretis's reading of Nicolas Roeg's *Bad Timing*. The strategies and practices of women's film-making are discussed in articles by Judith Mayne, Kaja Silverman and Ruby Rich, but in rather different ways. Judith Mayne's essay, 'The Woman at the Keyhole: Women's Cinema and Feminist Criticism' investigates the relationship of women as film-makers and as film consumers to the characteristic voyeurism of cinema. In 'Disembodying the Female Voice' Kaja Silverman explores the ways in which the synchronisation of the female voice and the female image in classical cinema is deconstructed in avant-garde feminist texts. Ruby Rich's article 'From Repressive Tolerance to Erotic Liberation' re-examines Leontine Sagan's *Maedchen in Uniform* as a film which, she argues, must be read not only in terms of its historical context in Weimar culture, but also as part of a continuing tradition of lesbian cinema.

Although differing from each other in perspective and methodology, the writers of *Re-Vision* share a common interest in the issue of female spectatorship, an interest which opens up new possibilities for thinking about the relationship between film texts and their social and cultural contexts. In attempting to define what a women's cinema might be, *Re-Vision* and *Women and Film* help clarify and advance existing work. What is particularly useful about these books is the way they bring together the study of films primarily directed at a female audience – such as the 'woman's picture' of the '30s and '40s and the new women's cinema of the '70s – with analyses of strategies and practices of women's film-making. This interest in films produced by and for women marks a shift in recent feminist film criticism towards woman as subject in and for cinema, a move which enables links to be made between women's position as spectators and their practice as makers of film. Nevertheless, concepts of the female subject and the female look pose problems for feminist film theory.

In their introduction, the editors of *Re-Vision* acknowledge the dilemma posed by the notion of femininity as repressed within patriarchal discourse. The theory of gendered subjectivity developed in relation to cinema during the '70s provided a useful critical tool for investigating the psychic mechanisms through which cinema engaged the spectator. But the spectator in question here was male: the female subject was seen as an absence in cinematic discourse. For the woman in the audience, the image of women on the screen could only reflect back the erotic spectacle of male desire or the monstrous threat of male castration. The problem with this theorisation of feminine subjectivity as unspeakable and unknowable is that it deals with the feminine spectator constructed *by* cinema, but not the female audience *in* the cinema. It cannot explain how women look at films nor how they may act to change them:

The problem with this approach ... is that it leaves the feminist analyst nowhere to stand. The notion of 'identity', temporary as it might be, would appear to be crucial to the development of any politics, even a politics of signification. The feminist theorist is thus confronted with something of a double bind: she can continue to analyse and interpret various instances of the repression of woman, of her radical absence in the discourses of

men . . . or she can attempt to delineate a feminine specificity, always risking a recapitulation of patriarchal constrictions and a naturalisation of 'woman'.[9]

I would argue that if the objective is to move from refusing any position for woman to an analysis of how and why women do resist patriarchal discourse the risks are worth it. Ann Kaplan recognises the same problem:

Women critics and filmmakers have been positioned in negativity – in subverting rather than positing. The dangers of undermining the notion of the unified self and of a world of essences are relativism and despair.[10]

Yet in *Women and Film*, Kaplan does not really address criticisms of psychoanalytic theories of female subjectivity, but rather suggests these can be accommodated within the existing theoretical framework. This means that while she raises important questions about woman's relation to looking in cinema, she does not develop these very much further. For example, at various points in discussing the struggle over representations of women in Hollywood cinema, it is suggested that the female spectator may actively identify with a female character. Thus, in *Blonde Venus*, for instance, the Marlene Dietrich character makes the female spectator aware of the way her body is constructed as spectacle for the male gaze: this awareness generates an ironic play that makes the character pleasurable to a female audience. While Kaplan argues that this is evidence of a gap in the system of cinematic discourse through which women might recognise patriarchy at work, she does not extend this insight towards a theory of female reading.

That these issues are a matter of ongoing debate within feminist film criticism is evident from different positions taken up by the various writers in *Re-Vision*. Mary Ann Doane focuses on the relationship between text and spectator in an analysis of female spectatorship and the

[9] *Re-Vision*, op cit, p 9.

[10] E Ann Kaplan, op cit, p 140.

Blonde Venus: adopted by feminist critics as a key text.

'woman's picture' of the '40s. Doane considers the female spectator 'as a construction of the textual system and its discursive emplacement'[11], concluding that although she is dealing with films made for an audience of women, the female spectator is actually denied the space to make a reading. '(T)he woman's exercise of an active, investigating gaze can only be simultaneous with her own victimization.'[12] Since the heroines of these films inevitably suffer persecution, illness or death, the only subject position offered the female spectator is one of masochistic fantasy. But, complex and interesting as Doane's analysis seems, it offers no explanation of why women went to see such films, and presumably enjoyed them, in the 1940s, nor of why they should still hold an enduring fascination for us today.

Also in Re-Vision, the essay by Linda Williams considers why women close their eyes in horror films – given that when they do look something nasty happens. In the classic horror genre as well as in more recent 'psychopathic' films, argues Williams, the woman's desire to look and know is punished by terror, mutilation or death. But Williams also sees a subversive potential in the crucial moment of woman's gaze at the 'monster' which, she suggests, should be seen as a gaze not only of terror but of recognition and affinity too. To a male spectator, both monster and woman represent the threat of sexual difference, a threat of the 'feared power and potency of a different kind of sexuality'[13]. The recognition of a non-phallic sexuality shared by the woman and the monster therefore opens up a space for representing a different feminine subjectivity, a space which the recent film The Company of Wolves (1984) attempts to explore, albeit not very satisfactorily. Such a representation, though, is clearly risky for women. As Williams points out, the shift in recent 'women-in-danger' films – such as Dressed to Kill (1980) – between sympathy with the woman as victim and pleasure in violence against women is quite rightly of concern to feminists.

It is important for feminist criticism to be able to analyse how film texts operate to deny, contain and eliminate the threat posed by female sexuality, as well as to identify the moments when it threatens to subvert or open up meaning. but if meanings are to be reconstructed in the interests of women, then we also need to be able to explain why representations change, and how it is possible at certain moments for 'dominant

discourses' to be read 'against the grain'. In the case of the horror genre, Linda Williams offers no explanation of why violence against women became increasingly explicit in such films during the 1970s. Neither does she refer to feminist actions against Dressed to Kill which were important in defining the contexts in which it was viewed, or refused a viewing, by women. But, as Judith Mayne argues in 'The Woman at the Keyhole',

It is the work of criticism to make connections – between the different contexts that define film (production, exhibition, reception) and between cinema and the sociohistorical context in which it is produced and received. And, perhaps most important, the task of criticism is to examine the processes that determine how films evoke responses and how spectators produce them.[14]

A similar point is made by Christine Gledhill, who also stresses the need to develop a theory of spectatorship which takes account of contextual as well as of textual relations:

Ultimately... the problem for feminists attempting to criticise current developments in film theory and ideological analysis lies in the need to conceptualize the triple relation subject/reader/audience.... The general lack in film theory of a means to conceptualize the social relations in which a specific audience is constituted can lead to severe limitations on proposals for subversive cultural activity.[15]

This point is politically important for feminists, since it identifies the objectives of critical work in terms not solely of struggles around the text, but also as a means of understanding how various social audiences may take up and make use of

11 Mary Ann Doane, 'The "Woman's Film": Possession and Address', in Re-Vision, op cit, p 68.

12 ibid, p 72.

13 Linda Williams, 'When the Woman Looks', in Re-Vision, op cit, p 87.

14 Judith Mayne, 'The Woman at the Keyhole', in Re-Vision, op cit, p 61.

15 Christine Gledhill, 'Developments in Feminist Film Criticism', in Re-Vision, op cit, p 40.

texts. Variations in readings by different audiences may be informed by differences in class and race as well as gender, for example. As Janice Winship says of advertising: 'It makes the world of difference whether we are women or men, working class or middle class, black or white, reading the ads.'[16] A theory which attempts to deal with the relationship between women's positioning as subjects of film and their positioning as gendered, class and ethnic subjects in other discourses might begin to explain the conditions under which 'subcultural resistance' is produced. Without such a theory, it is difficult to explain in social and cultural terms why and under what circumstances the 'meaning effect' of films works, or how readings 'against the grain' are made. Focusing on the reception of films opens up several areas of analysis: the relation between 'texts' and 'effects'; what women's viewing positions under patriarchy might be like; and strategies for feminist film-making in relation to concrete viewing contexts. Many feminist film-makers are already concerned with these issues on a practical level; and within feminist criticism, theoretical analysis of the relationship between text and context, gendered spectator and social audience, has recently been inaugurated.[17]

In her 'Afterthoughts', Christine Gledhill pursues some ideas raised briefly in her original 1978 essay 'Developments in Feminist Film Criticism'. These indicate ways in which it may be possible to move beyond the equation of femininity and difference by 'locating those spaces in which women, out of their socially constructed difference as women, can and do resist'.[18] Gledhill suggests that by considering social relations of gender which position women in particular ways, feminist criticism can begin to look at how an audience of women can produce quite contradictory readings of one film. But while Gledhill clearly wants to shift the focus of feminist criticism away from the concept of the feminine subject as a textual construct towards a consideration of socially constructed gender differences in the audience, it is not clear whether she wants to maintain a distinction between them. Gledhill offers no specific suggestions as to how feminist film theory might be developed to take account of the relationship between the feminine subject and the female audience.

In 'Woman at the Keyhole: Women's Cinema and Feminist Criticism', Judith Mayne discusses the position of women as viewers in relation specifically to the work of women film-makers Dorothy Arzner, Germaine Dulac and Marguerite Duras. The metaphor of the keyhole suggests that while women occupy a problematic place in relation to the voyeuristic structures of dominant cinema, in women's cinema there is a female perspective at work which sets up a different relationship between woman as spectator and woman as represented in the film. Mayne argues that the position of women as spectators is in fact more complicated than the dichotomy male = voyeur and female = spectacle might suggest. The female audience is frequently addressed in the 'masculine' insofar as it is invited to adopt a masculine viewpoint from which to understand the narrative. Women as viewers are involved in a constant struggle between 'embrace' and 'disavowel' in watching mainstream cinema, or as Ruby Rich puts it:

For a woman today, film is a dialectical experience in a way that it never was, and never will be for a man under patriarchy. Brecht once described the exile as the ultimate dialectician in that the exile lives the tension of two different cultures. That's precisely the sense in which the woman spectator is an equally inevitable dialectician.... As a woman going into the movie theatre, you are faced with a context that is coded wholly for your invisibility, and yet, obviously, you are sitting there and bringing along a certain coding from life outside the theatre.... The cinematic codes have structured our absence to such an extent that the only choice allowed to us is to identify either with Marilyn Monroe or with the man behind me hitting the back of my seat with his knees.[19]

Rich goes on to ask a series of questions:

[16] Janice Winship, 'Handling Sex', *Media, Culture and Society*, January 1981, vol 3 no 1.

[17] See Annette Kuhn, 'Women's Genres' in *Screen*, January-February 1984, vol 25 no 1, pp 18-28, for a fuller discussion of this issue.

[18] Christine Gledhill in *Re-Vision*, op cit, p 42.

[19] B Ruby Rich quoted in Judith Mayne, *Re-Vision*, op cit, p 61.

How does one formulate an understanding of a structure that insists on our absence even in the face of our presence? What is there in a film with which a woman viewer identifies? How can the contradictions be used as a critique? And how do all these factors influence what one makes as a woman film-maker, or specifically as a feminist film-maker?[20]

Elsewhere in *Re-Vision*, Mayne, Rich and Silverman pose similar questions about how films made by women may construct a different relationship between the woman on the screen and the woman as spectator. While each writer has different ideas about the most useful critical approach to women's cinema, they all share a concern with the crucial question of appropriate strategies for feminist cultural production.

This question is taken up by Ann Kaplan in a useful summary of debates about realist and avant-garde strategies in feminist film.[21] While Kaplan basically accepts the semiotic critique of realism, she cautiously argues that distinctions need to be made between different types of realism, linking her arguments to the question of how audiences make sense of films. She wants to hold onto a difference between types of realist film, between the strategies of a Hollywood fiction like *An Unmarried Woman* on the one hand, and those of a feminist documentary such as *Janie's Janie* on the other. While Kaplan concedes that the issue of how feminist audiences make use of such films is important, she does not herself develop these ideas, suggesting in effect that any discussion of how spectators produce readings is hampered by lack of empirical research. In one sense, though, this misses the point that there is a need for *theoretical* work which explores the relationship between the construction of the feminine subject in cinema and the activity of women audiences. By ignoring this issue, feminist criticism may become locked into a debate over textual strategies which is in the end paralysing rather than productive for feminist film practice.

In this context it is worth asking about the relationship posed in *Women and Film* and *Re-Vision* between criticism and its objects of study. How does each book further our understanding of various feminist perspectives on mainstream and independent cinema? Feminist criticism has clearly played an important role in constructing certain films as objects of study: Von Sternberg's

Blonde Venus, for example, has in effect become a 'feminist' film by virtue of its adoption by feminist critics as a key text. In the case of mainstream films this may not matter much, but it is more problematic in relation to women's independent cinema. In writing about films, feminist critics make them visible, which in turn has an effect on their distribution and exhibition. If the same films by a limited number of women film-makers are repeatedly discussed in books and journals then these too become key texts, with the potential consequence that a wider range of feminist film practice goes unrecognised. Since the choice of films is conditioned by critics' theoretical frameworks, the question of which theories become privileged in feminist film criticism is crucial. This is the nub of criticisms of Ann Kaplan's book made by some feminist film critics in the United States, who have argued that Kaplan's adherence to semiotic and psychoanalytic theory means that, although she does discuss various types of independent film-making by women, her choice of films is premised on the view that the avant-garde 'theory' film represents the most significant direction for feminist cinema.[22] Consequently a limited set of films is analysed in detail while others – acknowledged by Kaplan as important to feminism – are not. Because *Women and Film* is intended for teaching purposes, these patterns of choice may be reproduced in the structure of film study courses. And while Kaplan shows that she is aware of other feminist perspectives these remain peripheral to her main arguments. *Re-Vision* differs somewhat from *Women and Film* in these respects: as a set of independent essays, it represents a wider range of approaches within feminist film criticism and the selection of films discussed seems more arbitrary. However, the book's editorial 'voice' does tend to endorse a semiotic and psychoanalytic approach as most productive for feminist film theory.

20 B Ruby Rich, 'Women and Film: A Discussion of Feminist Aesthetics', in *New German Critique*, no 13, 1978.

21 E Ann Kaplan, op cit, ch 10.

22 Sarah Halprin, op cit and B Ruby Rich, 'Cinefeminism and its Discontents', op cit.

The question here is not so much whether any one approach is more useful than others, as the degree to which it constructs an orthodoxy within feminist film criticism which effectively excludes others. While psychoanalytic explanations of the construction of gendered subjectivity have been of enormous importance in feminist cultural analysis, psychoanalysis cannot, by its nature, deal with social, historical and institutional factors in the production and consumption of culture. Perhaps the time has come to acknowledge the limitations of current theories and move on from there. While this is a methodological issue, it is at the same time also a political one. Issues around film audiences, and particularly the construction of feminist audiences, open up a new area of investigation for feminist film criticism: who are the women in the audience, and how should feminist film-makers address them?

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SUSANNAH RADSTONE REVIEWS
'ALICE DOESN'T'

In her introduction to *Alice Doesn't*, Teresa de Lauretis describes her intention as to explore 'the manner and the effects of the relation between women as historical subjects and "woman" – a fictional construct, a distillate from diverse but congruent discourses dominant in Western culture.'[1] Throughout this immensely difficult, sometimes bewildering, yet often highly suggestive study, de Lauretis insists that 'women continue to become "woman"' (p 186). Feminist theory, which has yet to find a way to intervene within those practices and processes which work to position historical, 'flesh and blood' women as 'woman', has its work cut out for it – and since it is 'through the very practice of signs by which we live, write, speak, see ....' (p 186) that subjectivity is constructed as gendered, that work *must* be undertaken within the field of semiotics. However, since for de Lauretis, all semiotic theory to date has been constructed around an implicitly *male* subject, the task she takes upon herself is no less than the entire re-structuring of the field, in order to make possible the theorisation of an *active female subject* – a female subject capable of refusing the relation of women to 'woman' as constructed by and within dominant cultural practices.

For it seems to me that only ... by knowing us to be both woman and women, does a woman today become a subject. In this 1984, it is the signifier who plays and wins before Alice does, even when she's aware of it. But to what end, if Alice doesn't?' (p 186).

De Lauretis re-constructs semiotics through a careful and detailed re-reading of a wide range of

(mostly male) theorists of semiotics, psychoanalysis and film theory – two key names among these being Umberto Eco and C S Peirce. She argues that while the subject of Lacanian psychoanalysis, of Lévi-Straussian and Saussurian semiotics and of much *Screen* theory as an implicitly male one, Peirce's introduction of the term 'experience', here defined as an ongoing process through which gendered subjectivity is continually structured and re-structured, could provide feminist cultural theory with the epistemological tools with which to construct a theory of 'that political, theoretical, self-analysing practice by which the relations of the subject in social reality can be re-articulated from the historical experience of women' (p 186).

The first essay in this collection, 'Through The Looking-Glass: Woman, Cinema, and Language', examines the position of the subject in recent film theories developed from psycho-analysis and semiotics. Both are said to 'deny women the status of subjects and producers of culture' (p 8), ascribing to them a position of non-coherence in both language and cinema. If this is so, 'what does it mean to speak, to write, to make films as a woman?' (p 14). Since for de Lauretis, both psychoanalysis and semiotic theory are unable to engage with these questions, she suggests that feminist theory must turn away from Lacan, Saussure and Lévi-Strauss and 'seek other ways of mapping the terrain in which meanings are produced' (p 33). To this end, she proposes a re-consideration of the notion of 'code' as re-defined in Eco's *Theory of Semiotics* as a means of re-mapping the meaning/signification relation, re-centring the subject as the site of the relation of the technical and the social. Yet Eco's emphasis is on 'the *producer* of signs'. 'The woman who cannot

[1] Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, London, Macmillan, 1984, p 7. All further citations will include page numbers in the text.

transform the codes'... 'now finds herself in the empty space between the signs, in a void of meaning, where no demand is possible and no code available...' (p 35).

De Lauretis's stress on the masculinity of the subject within semiotics and Lacanian analysis seems important for feminist cultural theory. But her style is somewhat troubling:

The following essay, then, is written on the wind, through the silence that discourse prescribes for me, woman writer, and across the chasm of its paradox that would have me at once captive and absent ... (p 14).

The lure of this Heathcliffian melancholy seems related in anything but an arbitrary fashion to the difficulty and exclusivity of this text. And it is perhaps unsurprising that while de Lauretis does pay lip-service to the significance of context and of class, these issues are not dealt with extensively in a text which expresses a commitment to a theoretical engagement with the 'semiotics of experience'.

There is much of interest in the second essay in *Alice Doesn't*, though this essay, entitled 'Imaging', is also one of the most difficult in the collection. Here the aim is the reformulation of the relation between representation and meaning to avoid the theoretical impasse raised for feminist cultural theory by the always-already male subject of Lacanian psychoanalysis and semiotics. De Lauretis constructs a new model of this relation with the aid of certain conceptual terms borrowed from physiological theories of perception, notably 'mapping' and the 'phantom percept'. These terms are mobilised to incorporate within a theory of representation – or 'imaging' – a sense of the 'illusoriness' of *all* representations/meanings, an illusoriness that is not to be rejected, but rather worked *with*, in order to 'articulate the relations of the female subject to representation, meaning and vision, and in so doing to construct the terms of another frame of reference, another measure of desire' (p 68).

Thus de Lauretis suggests that feminist cultural theory need not reject narrative and visual pleasure – its work 'to reconstruct or organise vision from the impossible place of female desire' (p 68) should rather be undertaken on the back of these structures and *with*, as well as against, the illusory coherence of dominant cultural forms. The 'Mulveyan' anti-illusionist, avant-garde cinema of unpleasure is consequently rejected, as 'its value for feminism is severely curtailed by its discursive context, its "purposefulness", and the terms of its address' (p 68).

'Imaging', then, invites us to reconsider and reject quite a significant part of recent feminist film theory in favour of an approach whose theoretical credibility depends, paradoxically perhaps, upon a prior acceptance of the validity of certain terms borrowed from one of the 'natural' sciences – physiology – and whose conclusions, at the same time, seem strangely familiar. For it seems to me that de Lauretis's arguments have much in common here with those of the far more popular (and comprehensible!) school of post-Gramscian feminist cultural criticism. (I'm thinking here, particularly, of the work of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies.) In both cases, avant-gardist 'deconstructivist' texts are ultimately rejected in favour of a cultural politics which aims to work with already familiar and pleasurable forms. Thus in my reading of the remaining essays in this collection, my intention will be to ascertain whether, in fact, we really *need* all of this weight and complexity of theorisation in order to reach a position similar to that finally reached in *Alice Doesn't*.

In 'Imaging', de Lauretis has already argued against the value for feminism of a materialist avant-garde cinema. In her third essay – 'Snow on the Oedipal Stage'[2] – she substantiates this argument through a reading of one such film, Michael Snow's *Presents*. She argues that *Presents* fails to produce a positive semantic space for women spectators, and that what it finally demonstrates 'is the grand illusion of a non-illusionist cinema so dear to some sectors of the avant-garde' (p 81). This argument depends upon the author's prior restructuring of semiotics, and introduces the cornerstone of her theorisation of the possibility of the production of a semantic space for the active female spectator, i.e. the crucial significance, for feminist theory, of a fuller understanding of the relation btween narrativity and 'ways of seeing'. 'I will propose', she begins, 'that narrativity,

2 A revised version of an article which originally appeared in *Screen* 1981, vol 22 no 3.

perhaps even more than language, is at work in our ways of seeing...that narrativity, because of its inscription of the movement and positionalities of desire, is what mediates the relation of image and language' (p 78-79). By means of this model, the author attempts to construct a space for an active female subject, a theoretical possibility which, she argues, has been precluded by previous semiotic and psychoanalytic theories of meaning/representation.

It seems to me, however, that while a post-Gramscian reading of *Presents* would, like that of de Lauretis, ascribe a severely limited value to the film, the *grounds* for this reading, unlike hers, would take into account the political/historical context within which this film is positioned as well as, crucially, the differentiation along the lines of sexuality, class and ethnicity among its historical women spectators. The value of de Lauretis's engagements with particular texts seem severely curtailed by her inability to engage with these complexities, particularly in the essay following, in which she produces a very laudatory reading of Nicholas Roeg's *Bad Timing*.

Here de Lauretis begins by engaging critically with a (hypothetically) Foucauldian reading of the film – a reading which she ultimately rejects, since 'Foucault's rallying point, bodies and pleasures, which in a way is represented in the character of Milena, turns out to be useful and good for Alex, and very clearly bad, in fact impossible, for Milena' (p 92). De Lauretis's refutation of the Foucauldian vindication of 'bodies and pleasures' is deftly executed, though I find it somewhat paradoxical in the context of her own favourable reading of *Bad Timing*. Foucault is roundly chastised for his 'paradoxical conservatism', evidenced by his descriptions of

power and resistance, bodies and pleasures and sexuality as if the ideological structures and effects of patriarchy and sexual differentiation had nothing to do with history, indeed as if they had no discursive status or political implications. The rape and sexual extortion performed on little girls by young adult males is a 'bit of theatre' (p 94).

Yet de Lauretis proceeds to praise a film whose *coup de théâtre* is Alex's rape of the drugged Milena. It is interesting that she feels no

Bad Timing: 'femininity...as the figure of a racial and irreducible difference'.

114 obligation to engage with a widespread feminist antagonism to the film – particularly since her final essay prioritises the theoretical significance of 'experience' for a full understanding of the relation between women and 'woman'.

Instead, de Lauretis goes on to produce a Kristevian reading of the film, in which she suggests that in the figure of Milena, Roeg has found a way to represent the paradox 'women cannot be'. 'This "unspoken" of femininity', argues de Lauretis, 'this "not represented" or representable, this negativity as the underside of discourse is the sense in which, I will attempt to show, Roeg's film inscribes the figure of a radical and irreducible difference' (p 95).

The silent, scarred heroine of *Bad Timing* returns this study to the vexed question of how to represent an active femininity: 'How can the female spectator be entertained as the subject of the very movement that makes her the figure of its own closure?' the author inquires, adding 'clearly, at least for women spectators we cannot assume identification to be single or simple' (p141). In 'Desire in Narrative', de Lauretis attempts to outline a theory of the split identification of the female spectator. Here she retains the familiar scenario outlined by Laura Mulvey, in which the female spectator is positioned as masculine – and active – identifying with the camera's look, *as well as* feminine and passive, identifying with its imaged female object. However, de Lauretis argues that this division, left as theorised, would leave the female subject irreparably divided were it not for the existence of a *prior* set of identifications – with the figure of narrative movement, the mythical subject, and with the figure of narrative closure, the narrative image. 'Were it not for the possibility of this second figural identification,' she argues, 'the woman spectator would be stranded between two incommensurable entities, the gaze and the image . . . . It is this narrative identification that assures the "hold of the image", the anchoring of the subject in the flow of the film's movement' (p 144).

In order to alter the female subject's relationship to the current monopoly held by 'male discursive fellowships', de Lauretis suggests that women's cinema must work both with and against narrative in order to represent not just the power of female desire, but its duplicity and ambivalence. 'This will not be accomplished by another normative narrative

wrapped around a thematics of liberation,' she argues, 'the real task is to enact the contradiction of female desire and of women as social subjects, in the terms of narrative . . . ' (p 156).

If this chapter's rather weighty style seems to indicate an inability or reluctance to break away from the terms of a 'masculine discursive fellowship', that difficulty is, somewhat paradoxically, amplified in this study's final essay. I say paradoxically, since its engagement here with the works of Eco and of Peirce is ostensibly undertaken in order to elaborate a theory of the relation between women's experience and subjectivity.

De Lauretis uses the term 'experience' to describe that process 'by which, for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed' (p 159), and goes on to argue that 'if it is to further our critical understanding of how the female subject is en-gendered, which is also to say, how the relation women to "woman" is set up and variously reproduced, the notion of experience must be elaborated theoretically' (pp 159-160). Once more, she turns her attention to the return, in Lévi-Strauss, in Lacan, and in the Brechtian cinema outlined by '70s *Screen*, of a masculine subject. 'Why', she goes on to ask, 'are we still surprised or unwilling to accept that like the *Screen* discourse on the subject, psycho-analysis can only speak of women as "woman" . . . ?' (p 165).

In the remainder of this essay, de Lauretis attempts to produce a theory which can address women rather than 'woman', via another 'detour through semiotics' (p 167). Within that field she designates two major emphases – the first exemplified by the work of Julia Kristeva and Christian Metz who are also strongly influenced by psychoanalysis, and the second exemplified by Umberto Eco, whose work has been strictly anti-psychoanalytic. De Lauretis suggests that 'there is, between these two emphases of semiotics, an area of theoretical overlap, a common ground, and there one ought to pose the question of the subject, locating subjectivity in the space contoured by the discourses of semiotics and psychoanalysis, neither in the former nor in the latter, but rather in their discursive intersection' (p 168).

In a somewhat breathless conclusion to this search for a common ground, de Lauretis draws upon the work of Eco and of C S Peirce in order to theorise a relation between experience and

gendered subjectivity. From Peirce, she borrows the notion of 'habit' as 'the issue of a series of "significate effects"' (p 182), before going on to define experience as 'a complex of habits resulting from the semiotic interaction of "outer world" and "inner world", the continuous engagement of a self or subject in social reality' (p 182). If the female subject is one constituted in a particular relation to social reality, then 'what remains to be analysed by feminist theory is that experience, that complex of habits, dispositions, associations and perceptions which engender one as female' (p 182). The specificity of a feminist theory may be sought 'in that political, theoretical, self-analysing practice by which the relations of the subject in social reality can be re-articulated from the historical experience of women' (p 186). And she concludes by suggesting that 'consciousness raising' 'and better still, self-consciousness', are terms which can be applied to this process.

But surely that 'consciousness' begins in the daily discourses of women's lives, discourses which are too often marginalised, or altogether ignored, by the philosophical frameworks and vocabularies of this study. In which case, the negation of its title becomes not one of resistance, but of incapacity. Analyse 'that complex of habits, dispositions, associations and perceptions which engender one as female?' *Alice* can't.

ELEVENTH ANNUAL FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY CONFERENCE
ON COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AND FILM:

"Gender: Literary and Cinematic Representation."

Major speaker: Teresa de Lauretis, author of *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema;* also a panel discussion on a film, introduced and chaired by Peter Lehman, founding editor of *Wide Angle.* January 30 and 31, February 1, 1986. For further information, write to Jeanne Ruppert, University Press, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL, 32306.

INDIAN CINEMA: PLEASURES AND POPULARITY

AN INTRODUCTION BY ROSIE THOMAS

The pseudo-intellectuals here try to copy Westerners. We think we're better than Westerners – they can't make films for the Indian audience.
– Bombay film-maker

DISCUSSION OF INDIAN popular cinema as 'other' cinema is immediately problematic. There is no disputing that, within the context of First World culture and society, this cinema has always been marginalised, if not ignored completely. It has been defined primarily through its 'otherness' or 'difference' from First World cinema, and consumption of it in the West, whether by Asians or non-Asians, is something of an assertion: one has chosen to view an 'alternative' type of cinema. However, this is a cinema which, in the Indian context, is an overridingly dominant, mainstream form, and is itself opposed by an 'Other': the 'new', 'parallel', 'art' (or often simply 'other') cinema which ranges from the work of Satyajit Ray, Shyam Benegal and various regional film-makers, to Mani Kaul's 'avant-garde' or Anand Patwardhan's 'agitational' political practice. In these terms Indian popular cinema is neither alternative nor a minority form. Moreover, in a global context, by virtue of its sheer volume of output, the Indian entertainment cinema still dominates world film production, and its films are distributed throughout large areas of the Third World (including non-Hindustani-speaking areas and even parts of the Soviet Union), where they are frequently consumed more avidly than both Hollywood and indigenous 'alternative' or political cinemas. Such preference suggests that these films are seen to be offering something positively different from Hollywood, and in fact, largely because it has always had its own vast distribution markets, Indian cinema has, throughout its long history[1], evolved as a form which has resisted the cultural imperialism of Hollywood. This is not, of course, to say that it has been 'uninfluenced' by Hollywood: the form has undergone continual change and there has been both inspiration and assimilation from Hollywood and elsewhere, but thematically and structurally, Indian cinema has remained remarkably distinctive.

Corresponding to this diversity of contexts, each constructing Indian

popular cinema as a different object, has been considerable confusion of critical and evaluative perspectives. This article will examine the ways in which this cinema has been discussed by critics in India and abroad, and will suggest that, as a first step, the terms of reference of the Indian popular cinema itself should be brought into the picture. It attempts to do this, using material from discussions with Bombay film-makers[2] about what, for them, constitutes 'good' and 'bad' Hindi cinema in the 1970s and '80s.[3] Points will be illustrated through the example of one very popular, and at the time of release generally lauded, film, *Naseeb* (1981 *Destiny*)[4], whose producer/director, Manmohan Desai, is Bombay's most consistently commercially successful film-maker. It will be suggested that, while First World critical evaluation outside these terms of reference is, at best, irrelevant and also often racist, to impose a theoretical framework developed in the West – particularly one concerned with examining textual operations and the mechanisms of pleasure – does allow useful questions to be asked, as well as opening up the ethnocentrism of these debates.

The most striking aspect of First World discourse on Indian popular cinema must be its arrogant silence. Until home video killed the market in the '80s, the films had been in regular distribution in Britain for over 30 years, yet ghettoised in immigrant areas, unseen and unspoken by most non-Asians. Even in 1980, when the first Bombay film (*Amar Akbar Anthony*) was shown on British television, it passed more or less unnoticed: the BBC not only programmed it early one Sunday morning, without even troubling to list it with other films on the *Radio Times* film preview page, but pruned it of all its songs and much narrative, including most of the first two reels, which are, not surprisingly, crucial to making any sense of the film. Although the situation has begun to change over the past two years, largely through the initiative of Channel Four's two seasons of Indian entertainment cinema, the traditional attitude remains one of complacent ignorance. Clichés abound: the films are regularly said to be nightmarishly lengthy, second-rate copies of Hollywood trash, to be dismissed with patronising amusement or facetious quips. British television documentaries have a long tradition in perpetuating these attitudes, for the baroque surface of the Hindi film, particularly if taken out of context, makes for automatic comedy. Even *Time Out*'s TV section recently announced *Gunga Jumna* (a classic of Indian cinema, but obviously unpreviewed) with the smug throwaway: 'Sounds turgid, but who knows?'[5].

Where popular Indian films have been taken at all seriously, it has either been to subject them to impertinent criticism according to the canons of dominant Western film-making:

Mother India is a rambling tale of personal woe, narrated episodically in unsuitably pretty Technicolour.[6]

or to congratulate them patronisingly:

All told, a disarmingly enthusiastic piece of Eastern spectacle, exaggerated in

[2] This refers here primarily to those employed in the film industry as producers, directors, writers and distributors.

[3] Films produced in the Hindustani language (and primarily in Bombay) account for less than 20% of pan-Indian film production. However, they alone are distributed throughout the country and, having the bigtest budgets, stars and hence prestige, influence almost all regional language film-making.

[4] *Naseeb*'s box-office returns rank with those of three other films as the highest of 1981. It is one of the most expensive 'multi-starrers' ever produced in India (distribution rights sold for a little over £2 million in total).

[5] Geoff Andrew in *Time Out*, August 2-8, 1984.

[6] James Green, in the *Observer*, March 26, 1961, referring to *Mother India*.

118

7 'ER' in the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, September 1952, vol 19 no 224, referring to *Aan*

8 Virginia Graham in *The Spectator*, July 18, 1952, referring to *Aan.*

9 *Monthly Film Bulletin*, August 1963, vol 30 no 355, referring to *Gunga Jumna.*

10 A Vasudev and P Lenglet (eds) *Indian Superbazaar*, Vikas, Delhi, 1983, p 112.

11 F Rangoonwalla, *Indian Cinema Past and Present*, Clarion, Delhi, 1983.

presentation and acting, exotic, and yet charmingly naive. . . . [7]

They have generally been looked at as 'a stupendous curiosity' – even, in the '50s, as an ethnographic lesson, a way to:

. . . get to close grips with a handful of (India's) inhabitants. That Indians make the same faces as we do when they fall in love astounds me beyond measure . . . . [8]

But the most general theme since the 1960s has been unfavourable comparison with the Indian art cinema:

It all goes to prove once again that Satyajit Ray is the exception who proves the rule of Indian film-making. [9]

As Indian art cinema is comparatively well known and enthusiastically received in the West, and much conforms to conventions made familiar within European art cinema, Western audience assumptions about film form can remain unchallenged. In fact, the art films serve mostly to confirm the 'inadequacy' of popular cinema to match what are presumed to be universal standards of 'good' cinema – and even of 'art'. Western critics are perhaps not completely to blame, for they take their cues from the Indian upper-middle class intelligentsia and government cultural bodies, who have a long tradition of conniving at this denunciation and, somewhat ironically, themselves insist on evaluating the popular films according to the canons of European and Hollywood film-making. One commonly hears complaints about the films' 'lack of realism', about the preposterous 'singing and dancing and running round trees', and that the films are 'all the same' and simply 'copy Hollywood'. To dislike such films is, of course, their privilege. What is disturbing is the tone of defensive apology to the West and the shamefaced disavowal of what is undoubtedly a central feature of modern Indian culture. Thus, for example, Satish Bahadur, comparing popular cinema unfavourably with Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali* (which 'was a work of art . . . an organic form'), refers to its 'immaturity' and asserts:

The heavily painted men and women with exaggerated theatrical gestures and speech, the artificial-looking houses and huts and the painted trees and skies in the films of this tradition are less truthful statements of the reality of India. . . . [10]

Even Rangoonwalla, who has devoted considerable energy to compiling much of the published material available on Indian cinema, dismisses the work of the 1970s as 'a very dark period, with a silly absurd kind of escapism rearing its head,' [11] and he is tolerant of popular cinema only if it attempts 'sensible themes'.

One of the central platforms for this kind of criticism is the English language 'quality' press. Week after week, the Indian *Sunday Times* and *Sunday Express* produce jokey review columns which score easy points

off the apparent inanities of Hindi cinema. Typical is a *Sunday Times* feature entitled 'Not Only Vulgar but Imitative', which skims through all the critical clichés: absurd stories, poor imitations of Hollywood, lack of originality, and finally the myth of a golden age – of the *1960s* (sic) – when commercial films were 'gentle, warm-hearted, innocent'. Most significant is the fact that the article appeared – by no coincidence – in precisely the week that Bombay was full of Western delegates to the annual film festival. It makes no bones about its intended audience, to whom it defers:

not surprisingly the West cares little for these films. All that they stand for is exotica, vulgarity and absurdity. . . . [12]

Naseeb was, of course, received within this tradition. The *Sunday Express* review was captioned: 'Mindless Boring Melange', and, for example, described a central scene – in fact one that was spectacularly self-parodic, in which many top stars and film-makers make 'Guest Appearances' at a party – as:

a 'homage' to . . . all those who have, in the past thirty years, brought the Hindi film down to its present state of total garish mediocrity. In fact, the film encapsulates the entire history of our sub-standard 'entertainment' – elephantine capers . . . the manufactured emotion, the brutalism in talk and acting, the utterly 'gauche' dances. . . . [13]

The tone is echoed throughout the popular English-language (hence middle-class) press, and even among regular (middle-class) film-goers there appears to be huge resistance to admitting to finding pleasure in the form. Thus letters to film gossip magazines ran:

*Want to make **Naseeb**? Don't bother about a story or screenplay. You can do without both. Instead rope in almost the entire industry. . . . Throw in the entire works: revolving restaurant, London locales, and outfits which even a five year old would be embarrassed to wear to a fancy dress competition. Now, sit back, relax, and watch the cash pour in.* [14]

Manmohan Desai's concept of entertainment still revolves around the lost and found theme, with a lot of improbabilities and inanities thrown in. . . . But how long can such films continue to click at the box-office? Soon audiences are bound to come to their senses. [15]

There are also, of course, more serious and considered critical positions within India, notably of the politically conscious who argue, quite cogently, that Hindi cinema is capitalist, sexist, exploitative, 'escapist' mystification, politically and aesthetically reactionary, and moreover that its control of distribution networks blocks opportunities for more radical practitioners. It should, of course, be remembered that what may be pertinent criticism within India may be irrelevant – or racist – in the West, and apparently similar criticisms may have different meanings, uses and effects in different contexts. However, two central

[12] Khalid Mohamed in *Times of India*, 'Sunday Review', January 8, 1984.

[13] *Sunday Express*, May 3, 1981.

[14] Iqbal Masud in *Cine Blitz*, July 1981.

[15] *Star and Style*, November 13, 1981.

objections to all the criticisms do stand out. One is the insistence on evaluating Hindi cinema in terms of film-making practices which it has itself rejected, a blanket refusal to allow its own terms of reference to be heard. The second is the reluctance to acknowledge and deal with the fact that Hindi cinema clearly gives enormous pleasure to vast pan-Indian (and Third World) audiences. In view of this, such supercilious criticism does no more than wish the films away. Dismissing them as 'escapism' neither explains them in any useful way, nor offers any basis for political strategy, for it allows no space for questions about the specifics of the audiences' relationship to their so-called 'escapist' fare. What seems to be needed is an analysis which takes seriously both the films and the pleasures they offer, and which attempts to unravel their mode of operation.

Clearly, a body of 'film theory' developed in the West may mislead if it is used to squash Hindi cinema into Western film-making categories, particularly if it brutalises or denies the meanings and understandings of participants. Thus, for example, Hollywood genre classification is quite inappropriate to Hindi cinema and, although almost every Hindi film contains elements of the 'musical', 'comedy' and 'melodrama', to refer to the films in any of these ways imposes a significant distortion. Certainly no Indian film-maker would normally use such classifications. Important distinctions are marked instead by terms such as 'social', 'family social', 'devotional', 'stunt' or even 'multi-starrer' (terms hard to gloss quickly for a Western readership). However, the *concept* of genre, in its broadest sense – as structuring principles of expectation and convention, around which individual films mark repetitions and differences[16] – does appear to be potentially useful in opening up questions about Hindi cinema's distinctive form. In the first place, it moves immediately beyond the tired rantings about Hindi cinema's 'repetitiveness' and 'lack of originality' – although, on this point, some of the Bombay film-makers are in fact many steps ahead of their so-called 'intellectual' critics:

People seem to like the same thing again and again, so I repeat it . . . but you always have to give them something different too. . . . There can be no such thing as a 'formula film' – if there were, everybody would be making nothing but hits. . . . [17]

Secondly, it points to questions about narrative structure, modes of address and conventions of verisimilitude that, at the least, help organise description which can take Indian cinema's own terms of reference into account and from which further questions about spectatorship and pleasure become possible. The rest of this article attempts to illustrate such an approach.

Contrary to common 'intellectual' assumptions within India, the Indian mass audience is ruthlessly discriminating: over 85 per cent of films released in the last two years have not made profits[18], and these have included films with the biggest budgets and most publicity 'hype'. There is a clear sense among audiences of 'good' and 'bad' films, and the film-makers, committed as they are to 'pleasing' audiences, make it their

[16] Stephen Neale, *Genre* London, British Film Institute, 1980.

[17] Manmohan Desai, in interview with the author, May 1981.

[18] *Trade Guide*, January 5, 1985. Video piracy has had a particularly harsh effect on the Bombay film industry. However, even in the late '70s it is alleged that only 10% of releases made 'sizeable' profits (*Report of the Working Group on National Film Policy*, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, May 1980, p 17).

business to understand, and internalise, these assessments. While the yardstick of commercial success is of course central – for film-makers a 'good' film is ultimately one that makes money – they do also have a working model of (what they believe to be) the essential ingredients of a 'good' film and the 'right' way to put these together. This model evolves largely through the informal, but obsessive, post-mortems which follow films whose box-office careers confound expectations, and is undergoing continual, if gradual, redefinition and refinement.

Bombay film-makers repeatedly stress that they are aiming to make films which differ in both format and content from Western films, that there is a definite skill to making films for the Indian audience, that this audience has specific needs and expectations, and that to compare Hindi films to those of the West, or of the Indian 'art' cinema, is irrelevant. Their statements imply both a sense of the tyranny of this audience and a recognition of the importance of a class link between film-maker and audience. The example of the barely educated Mehboob Khan, whose cult classic *Mother India* (1957) still draws full houses today, is often cited proudly – buttressed by assertions that his film is 'of our soil', 'full of real Indian emotions' – and by that token inaccessible to the emotionally retarded, if not totally cold-blooded, West.[19]

Whatever the critics' clichés may suggest, no successful Bombay film-maker ever simply 'copies' Western films. Of course, most borrow openly both story ideas and sometimes complete sequences from foreign cinemas, but borrowings must always be integrated with Indian film-making conventions if the film is to work with the Indian audience: no close copy of Hollywood has ever been a hit.[20] Film-makers say that the essence of 'Indianisation' lies in: (1) the way that the storyline is developed; (2) the crucial necessity for 'emotion' (Western films are often referred to as 'cold'); and (3) the skilful blending and integration of songs, dances, fights and other 'entertainment values' within the body of the film. There is also the more obvious 'Indianisation' of values and other content, including reference to aspects of Indian life with which audiences will identify, particularly religion and patriotism. It is, for example, generally believed that science fiction would be outside the cultural reference of the Indian audience, and censorship restrictions mean that films about war, or overtly about national or international politics, risk being banned.

The film-makers' terms of reference often emerge most clearly when discussing a film which is judged a 'failure'. A trade press review[21] of *Desh Premee* (1982 *Patriot*), one of Manmohan Desai's few unsuccessful films, particularly revealing.

Desh Premee has all the ingredients that make a film a hit, yet every aspect is markedly defective. Firstly, the story has a plot and incidents but the narration is so unskilled that it does not sustain interest. There is no grip to the story. The situations are neither melodramatic, nor do they occur spontaneously, but look forced and contrived. Secondly, the music side is not as strong as the film demands. All songs are good average, but not one song can be declared a superhit. Thirdly, emotional appeal is lacking. Although

[19] It has, in fact, been generally well received in the West and is the only Indian film ever to have won an Oscar nomination (Best Foreign Film, 1958).

[20] Where European and Hollywood cinemas have drawn upon literary traditions for their story ideas, Hindi cinema has primarily looked to other films for basic stories to adapt. Inspiration from Hollywood is often integrated with storylines from the Indian mythological epics, e.g. a recent proposal' for a cross between *The Omen* and the *Mahabharat'*. The only virtual frame-to-frame remakes of Hollywood films (*Khoon Khoon* of *Dirty Harry* and *Manoranjan* of *Irma La Douce*) flopped disastrously. So did *Man Pasand*, based closely on *My Fair Lady*, a failure which the BBC ignored in its dismissive documentary on the film in 1982.

[21] There are two weekly Bombay trade papers, *Trade Guide* and *Film Information*. Their reviews are generally respected in the film industry (unlike all other press reviews, especially the Sunday critics') and do in fact have a good record in predicting subsequent box-office performance.

Poster for *Desh Premee*: 'all the ingredients that make a hit, yet . . . '.

there are a few scenes which try to arouse feelings, they fail to hit their objective. Fourthly, production values are average, considering the producer. The traditional grandeur of Manmohan Desai is missing, as are technical values.

   ***Desh Premee** has no sex appeal. The romantic part is too short. Comedy scenes and melodramatic scenes are missing. . . . [My precis: the stars' roles are not properly justified. . . . several appear for too short a time . . . action, thrills and background music are only average. . . .]*

   Several of the scenes look like repetitions from many old hits and there is no dose of originality in the film. . . . Although every formula film is basically unrealistic and far from the truths of life, everything can still be presented with acceptable realism and logic. But in this film there are several 'unbelievables' even with normal cinematic licence granted. This is not expected from any seasoned film-maker.[22]

Particularly interesting is the order in which defects are listed: the screenplay is recognised to be crucial, the music (i.e. the songs) of almost equal importance, 'emotional appeal' a significant third, and fourth are production values, or expensive spectacle. A 'dose of originality' and 'acceptable realism and logic' are additional points of general importance. Big stars are a decided advantage (viz. 'the ingredients that make a film a hit'), but cannot in themselves save a film – particularly if not exploited adequately, and in contrast, *Naseeb* on its release had been particularly praised for 'Assembling the biggest starcast ever (and) . . . justifying each and all of them.'[23]

   Two themes emerge from this review: firstly that of the expected narrative movement and mode of address, and secondly, the question of verisimilitude.

[22] *Trade Guide*, Special Edition, April 2, 1982 (with slight stylistic adaptations).

[23] *Trade Guide*, May 3, 1981.

Indian film-makers often insist that screenplay and direction are crucial and the storyline only the crudest vehicle from which to wring 'emotion' and onto which to append spectacle.

*It's much more difficult to write a screenplay for **Naseeb** than for a Western or 'art' film, where you have a straight storyline. A commercial Hindi film has to have sub-plots and gags, and keep its audience involved with no story or logic.*[24]

The assertion that Hindi films have 'no story' is sometimes confusing to those unfamiliar with the genre. 'Who cares who gets the story credits? Everyone knows our films have no stories', and, in fact, the story credits are often farmed out to accommodating friends or relatives for 'tax adjustment' purposes. However, Hindi cinema has by no means broken the hallowed bounds of narrative convention, and the most immediately striking thing about *Naseeb* is the fiendishly complex convolutions of this multi-stranded and very long succession of events, which neverthless culminate in an exemplarily neat resolution. What is meant by 'no story' is, first, that the storyline will be almost totally predictable to the Indian audience, being a repetition, or rather, an unmistakable transformation, of many other Hindi films, and second, that it will be recognised by them as a 'ridiculous' pretext for spectacle and emotion. Films which really have 'no story' (i.e. non-narrative), or are 'just a slice of life', or have the comparatively single-stranded narratives of many contemporary Western films, are considered unlikely to be successful.

The difference between Hindi and Western films is like that between an epic and a short story.[25]

Not only is a film expected to be two-and-a-half to three hours long, but it is usual for the plot to span at least two generations, beginning with the main protagonists' births or childhoods and jumping twenty or so years (often in a single shot) to the action of the present. There is of course good evidence that Hindi films have evolved from village traditions of epic narration, and the dramas and the characters, as well as the structure, of the mythological epics are regularly and openly drawn upon. Film-makers often insist that: 'Every film can be traced back to these stories', and even that 'There are only two stories in the world, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharat*.'[26] In fact, it is the form and movement of the narrative that tends to distinguish the Hindi film, the crux of this being that the balance between narrative development and spectacular or emotional excess is rather different.

As the *Trade Guide* review implies, audiences expect to be addressed in an ordered succession of modes. *Desh Premee* had failed allegedly because, among other reasons, there was no comedy, no melodrama, too little 'romance' and no 'emotion', while *Naseeb* had earlier been commended because 'everything' was there:

[24] K K Shukla, screenplay writer of *Naseeb*, in interview with the author, April 1981.

[25] Javed Akhtar, screenplay writer, in interview with the author, February 1981.

[26] The two key mythological epics of India.

[27] *Trade Guide*, May 3, 1981.

[28] Literally, spices.

balancing beautifully the story, the plot, the screenplay, the dialogue and dramatic situations ... (and) providing properly the thrills, the action, boxing, chasing and other modes. ... [27]

Film-makers talk about 'blending the *masalas* [28] in proper proportions' as one might discuss cookery, and (defensive stances for the benefit of Westerners or 'intellectuals' notwithstanding), they have a clear perception that these elements, including the inexcusably maligned songs and dances, are an important part of the work of the film, which is to achieve an overall balance of 'flavours'. Clearly, something of a commercial motivation is at work here (one puts in 'something for everybody'), but it is also considered very important that one does not 'just shove these things in', for, it is said, 'the audience always knows if you do'.

Naseeb's narrative movement is by way of swift juxtaposition of cameo scenes of spectacular – or humorous – impact, rather than steady development of drama. Clearly, as in all mainstream cinema, Hindi films work to offer the viewer a position of coherence and mastery, both through narrative closure and by providing a focus for identification within the film (in *Naseeb* this is a male hero with, as will be argued below, a particularly reassuring mastery of potent phantasy). However, spectacular and emotional excess will invariably be privileged over linear narrative development. The spectator is expected to be involved not primarily through anticipation of *what* will happen next, but through *how* it will happen and affective involvement in the happening: excitement, thrill, fear, envy, wonder, not to mention the eroticism which lies behind the desire for spectacle itself. While many Hindi films depend essentially on emotional drama (although with spectacle always of importance), *Naseeb* is primarily about spectacle – with song and dance, locations, costumes, fights and 'thrills' (or stunts), most of Bom-

Naseeb: a song and dance sequence.

bay's top stars, and sets which range from a luxury glass mansion to a baroque revolving restaurant and a fanciful 'London' casino. 'If the story is weak, you have to be a showman and show the public everything,'[29] says Desai. But unregulated, uncontained spectacle, however novel, interesting and pleasurable, always risks losing its audience's involvement (e.g. *Trade Guide*'s: 'The narration is so unskilled that it does not sustain interest'). *Naseeb* depends on two strategies to avoid this. One is its skill at swift transition between well balanced 'modes' of spectacle, the other the strength and reassuring familiarity of the narrative, which is, in fact, structured by discourses which are deeply rooted in Indian social life and in the unconscious (and in this its relationship with Indian mythological and folk narrative becomes particularly apparent).

Briefly, the story of *Naseeb* concerns the friendships, love affairs, family reunions and fights between the (adult) children of four men who won a lottery ticket together and fell out over division of the spoils. Any attempt at succinct summary of the intricacies of this extraordinarily convoluted plot and its characters' relationships is doomed to failure – nor is it strictly relevant. It is probably enough to point out that the story is built around three chestnuts of Hindi cinema which were particularly popular in the late '70s/'80s, the themes being: (1) 'lost and found' (parents and children are separated and reunited years later following revelation of mistaken identities); (2) *'dostana'* (two male friends fall in love with the same woman and the one who discovers this sacrifices his love – and often life – for the male friendship or *dostana*); and (3) revenge (villains get their just deserts at the hands of the heroes they wronged). Analysis of the narrative suggests that the discourses which structure it are those of kinship (the blood relationship and bonds expressed in its idiom), 'duty' and social obligation, solidarity, trust, and also a metaphysical discourse of 'fate' or 'destiny' and human impotence in the face
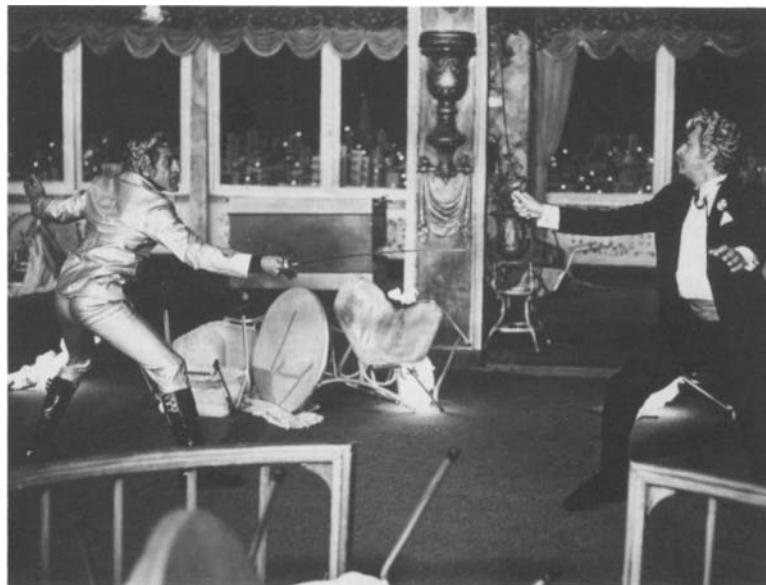
Naseeb: a fight sequence.

of this. Order, or equilibrium, is presented as a state in which humans live in harmony with fate, respecting social obligations and ties of friendship or family. Disruption of this order is the result of selfish greed, fate (or human meddling in fate) and (hetero)-sexual desire.

The narrative is built upon a simple opposition between good/morality and evil/decadence, and connotations of 'traditional' and 'Indian' are appended to morality, which is an ideal of social relations which includes respect for kinship and friendship obligations, destiny, patriotism and religion (and religious tolerance) as well as controlled sexuality. Evil or decadence is broadly categorised as 'non-traditional' and 'Western', although the West is not so much a place, or even a culture, as an emblem of exotic, decadent otherness, signified by whisky, bikinis, an uncontrolled sexuality and what is seen as lack of 'respect' for elders and betters, and (from men) towards womanhood.

Film-makers are quite aware of building their narratives around terms of an opposition so basic that audiences cannot easily avoid immersion:

Kinship emotion in India is very strong — so this element always works — that's what 'lost and found' is about. It doesn't work so well with educated audiences who go several days without seeing their families, but it works with B and C grade audiences who get worried if they don't see a family member by 6.30 p.m., whose family members are an important part of themselves and their experience of the world. [30]

However, the films also appear to deal with these basic family relationships at a much deeper level, and what appears to be highly charged imagery, which is not organised into conscious narrative coherence, regularly erupts in these films. Thus, for example, *Naseeb* boasts a scene whose parallels with the Oedipal scenario are hard to ignore, in which the father and 'good' son/hero, unaware of their blood relationship, are locked in mortal combat — the father wielding a knife above his prostrate son. Just as one is about to kill the other, the hero's foster mother, who had fallen and lost consciousness, revives, appears at the top of the stairs with a bleeding wound on her head prominently bandaged, and shrieks. The action freezes, mistaken identities are explained, and the son agrees to follow his father into combat with the villains. For this encounter the father hands over to him a special ring, bearing the mark of Hindu religion (the sacred symbol OM), which protects him in a succession of fights and later becomes the mechanism by which he escapes, on a rope, from a burning tower in which the villains (that which is not socialised) meet gory deaths. In fact, somewhat bizarrely, the film can be read as a narrative of masculine psychic development (the emergence of the sexed subject within the social order), with the early scenes of anarchic sexuality followed by an Oedipal crisis and a subsequent drama of sons following the Father into the Symbolic Order.

To point to the kind of reading that a very literal psychoanalysis produces is not to advocate reducing *Naseeb* — or psychoanalysis — to this. However, it does raise interesting questions about the relevance of psychoanalysis in the Indian context and, in fact, the greatest problem is

[30] K K Shukla, screenplay writer, in interview with the author, May 1981.

not how to *apply* such concepts, but whether one can *ignore* patternings which obtrude in so implausibly striking a manner. Although few films order their imagery in so fortuitously neat a diachrony, its potency and overtness is not unusual, and what a letter-writer can dismiss as nothing but 'the lost and found theme with a lot of improbabilities and inanities thrown in' can be very far from inane in the context of the spectator's own phantasy.

Verisimilitude

Beyond the basic suspension of disbelief on which cinema depends, any genre evolves and institutionalises its own conventions, which allow credibility to become unproblematic within certain parameters.[31] Compared with the conventions of much Western cinema, Hindi films appear to have patently preposterous narratives, overblown dialogue (frequently evaluated by film-makers on whether or not it is 'clapworthy'), exaggeratedly stylised acting, and to show disregard for psychological characterisation, history, geography, and even, sometimes, camera placement rules.[32]

Tolerance of overt phantasy has always been high in Hindi cinema, with little need to anchor the material in what Western conventions might recognise as a discourse of 'realism', and slippage between registers does not have to be marked or rationalised. The most obvious example is the song sequences, which are much less commonly 'justified' within the story (for example, introduced as stage performances by the fictional characters) than in Hollywood musicals. Hindi film songs are usually tightly integrated, through words and mood, within the *flow* of the film – 'In my films, if you miss a song, you have missed an important link between one part of the narration and the next'[33] – and misguided attempts to doctor Hindi films for Western audiences by cutting out the songs are always fatal. However, the song sequences (often also dream sequences) do permit excesses of phantasy which are more problematic elsewhere in the film, for they specifically allow that continuities of time and place be disregarded, that heroines may change saris between shots and the scenery skip continents between verses, whenever the interests of spectacle or mood require it.

Although Hindi film phantasy needs comparatively slight authenticating strategies, *Naseeb* does negotiate the terrain with care, and this is undoubtedly one of its strengths. In fact the viewer is immersed gradually, as the film moves through three phases: an initial mode bordering on 'social realism', a second period of self-reflexivity and parody, and a final phase in which dream imagery and logic are unproblematic. Particularly interesting are the middle scenes, which make self-conscious and sophisticated play with the ambiguity between registers. Thus, for example, in the party song mentioned above 'real' Bombay film stars appear, as themselves, at a film party located firmly within *Naseeb*'s fiction, and, throughout, the central hero's romance is presented largely as a parody of Hindi cinema clichés, with him actually

[31] Stephen Neale, op cit.

[32] Camera placement rules can be disregarded, particularly in action (fight) scenes, which seem to be allowed something of the non-continuity conventions of song sequences.

[33] Raj Kapoor, film-maker, in interview on *Visions*, Channel Four, February 1983.

Naseeb: self-parody in the film party scene.

commenting, after a dazzling display of kung-fu skills to rescue his pop-singer girl-friend from rapacious thugs: 'It's just like a Hindi film'. Later, when he finds her modelling for a throat pastille advertising film on the beach, he 'mistakes' the film scenario for 'reality' and, as the director yells 'Start camera' and a crew member runs into frame with a microphone, the hero (speaking to camera in both the film and the film within the film) begins a flowery proposal of marriage in the style of Hindi film dialogue.

Naseeb is undoubtedly unusual in taking the self-reflexive and self-parodic elements inherent in much Hindi cinema so far, but the fact that it *is* acceptable is significant. Despite what middle-class critics imply, it is clear, if one experiences an Indian audience irreverently clapping, booing and laughing with the films, that they know perfectly well that the films are 'ridiculous', 'unreal' and offer impossible solutions, and that pleasure arises in spite of – and probably because of – this knowledge.

However, this is not to say that 'anything goes': as the *Trade Guide* review implied, there is a firm sense of 'acceptable realism and logic', beyond which material is rejected as 'unbelievable'. In fact, the criteria of verisimilitude in Hindi cinema appear to refer primarily to a film's skill in manipulating the rules of the film's moral universe, and one is more likely to hear accusations of 'unbelievability' if the codes of, for example, ideal kinship behaviour are ineptly transgressed (i.e. a son kills his mother; or a father knowingly and callously causes his son to suffer), than if the hero is a superman who singlehandedly knocks out a dozen burly henchmen and then bursts into song.

Any rigorous discussion of the conventions of verisimilitude and the apparent tolerance of 'non-realism' in Hindi cinema would have to consider much wider issues, including concepts and conventions of

'realism' in Indian culture generally. However, even examination of the
cinematic heritage on which *Naseeb* draws is suggestive and,
significantly, Manmohan Desai and two of his writers learned their craft
as apprentices in the Wadia studios, producers of the two most popular
genres in Indian film-making history, the 'mythologicals' and the stunt
films. Although mythologicals were generally considered to be of higher
status ('the Brahmin of film genres'), film-makers recognised their
overlap ('mythologicals were just special effect and stunt films which
happened to be about gods rather than men'), for both were primarily
moral stories with displays of magical happenings, supermen and gods.
On the other hand, the influence of Hollywood cannot be ignored, from
James Bond, whose idiom inflects many recent films, to the phenomenal
impact of Douglas Fairbanks in the 1920s (when *Thief of Baghdad* was
the decade's most popular film[34]), or of Charlie Chaplin, who was as big
a star in India as elsewhere. Echoes can be found of all these traditions in
Naseeb.

[34] E Barnouw and S
Krishnaswami, *Indian
Film*, Oxford
University Press,
1980, p 47.

The Spectator

It would appear that the spectator-subject of Hindi cinema is positioned
rather differently from that of much Western cinema. In fact, even on
the most overt level, Indian cinema audience behaviour is distinctive:
involvement in the films is intense and audiences clap, sing, recite
familiar dialogue with the actors, throw coins at the screen (in apprecia-
tion of spectacle), 'tut tut' at emotionally moving scenes, cry openly and
laugh and jeer knowingly. Moreover, it is expected that audiences will

Magical happenings
among the gods: *Jai
Santoshimaa.*

35 Audiences often talk of dialogue as a central draw, and books and records of film dialogue sell sometimes better than collections of film music.

36 Annette Kuhn, 'Women's Genres', *Screen*, January-February 1984, vol 25 no 1, p 23.

37 L Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970.

see a film they like several times, and so-called 'repeat value' is deliberately built into a production by the film-makers, who believe that the keys to this are primarily the stars, music, spectacle, emotion and dialogue – this last having a greater significance than in Western cinema.[35]

What seems to emerge in Hindi cinema is an emphasis on emotion and spectacle rather than tight narrative, on *how* things will happen rather than *what* will happen next, on a succession of modes rather than linear denouement, on familiarity and repeated viewings rather than 'originality' and novelty, on a moral disordering to be (temporarily) resolved rather than an enigma to be solved. The spectator is addressed and moved through the films primarily via affect, although this is structured and contained by narratives whose power and insistence derives from their very familiarity, coupled with the fact that they are deeply rooted (in the psyche and in traditional mythology).

Whether, and how, one can relate the 'spectator-subject' of the films to the Indian 'social audience'[36] is not immediately clear, although certain comparisons with other discourses within India through which subjectivity is lived are suggestive. For example, it has been suggested[37] that Hindu caste, kinship and religious 'ideologies', in particular beliefs in destiny and *Karma*, position a decentred, less individuated social subject. One can also point to specific cultural traditions of performance and entertainment which must be of direct relevance, notably the forms on which early cinema drew, from the performances of the professional story-tellers and village dramatisations of the mythological epics, to the excesses of spectacle ('vulgar' and 'garish' according to contemporary critics) of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Urdu Parsee theatre with its indulgent adaptations of Shakespeare and Victorian melodrama. Beyond this, one must remember that Sanskrit philosophy boasts a coherent theory of aesthetics which bears no relation to Aristotelian aesthetics and, rejecting the unities of time and place and the dramatic development of narrative, the theory of *rasa* (flavours/moods) is concerned with moving the spectator through the text in an ordered succession of modes of affect *(rasa)*, by means of highly stylised devices. All Indian classical drama, dance and music draw on this aesthetic.

Of course, most present-day film-makers make no conscious reference to this heritage and, for example, the privileging of spectacle and music can be accounted for in many other ways, not least the pragmatic one that, to make money, the films need to appeal across wide linguistic and cultural divides within India itself. 'Tradition' cannot be used to provide too neat an 'explanation' of the present form – apart from anything else, Indian cultural 'tradition' is a heterogeneous assimilation of Sanskritic, Islamic, Judeo-Christian and many other influences, and could be selectively drawn upon to 'explain' almost any present form. Moreover, invoking tradition also holds dangers of uncritically romanticising the present form as exotically 'other' and ignoring its diverse influences and constant evolution. Its role should rather be seen as one of a framework

of terms of reference within which certain developments have been
stifled, others allowed to evolve unproblematically, and which can be
used to throw light on the different possibilities of forms of address
which might be expected or tolerated by an Indian audience.

This article has attempted to examine Indian popular cinema's 'terms
of reference' by placing it within a number of contexts: primarily that of
the film-makers' own descriptions of their films and generic expecta-
tions, but also briefly that of audiences, and of earlier and co-existing
cultural forms and traditions. There is, of course, the problem of the
infinite regress of context: no description of conditions and discourses
could ever be 'adequate' to contextualising Indian cinema. But any
criticism which ignores the specificity of the textual operations and
pleasures of Indian popular cinema will remain caught up in the
confusion and condescension which marked British responses to the
London release of *Aan* in 1952:

*But having proved themselves masters of every cliché in the Western cinema,
its remarkable producers should have a look around home and make an
Indian film.*[38] ·

[38] Unreferenced in BFI microfiche collection of *Aan* reviews in UK newspapers, 1952.

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TOWARDS A THEORETICAL CRITIQUE OF BOMBAY CINEMA

BY VIJAY MISHRA

ANY DISCUSSION OF films from a relatively alien culture – 'relatively' and 'alien' in Britain at any rate would have very different meanings than, say, in Australia – involves a certain element of redundancy. At the risk of sounding somewhat tedious, I will go over some of the propositions which I develop at some length later. My basic argument is relatively straightforward and requires no major theoretical apparatus for its enunciation. I read Bombay Film (capitalised, 'Film' and 'Cinema' are used interchangeably throughout this paper) as a form which is homologous with the narrative paradigm established over two millennia ago in the Sanskrit epics, namely the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* (hereinafter cited collectively as *MBh/Rama* and individually in full). Bombay films may, therefore, be seen as transformations of the narrative structures which may be discovered in these epics. Their influence, however, is not limited to narrative form alone. Since these epics were also ideological tools for the expansion of structures of belief endorsed by the ruling classes, there is also a significant way in which the Bombay Film legitimates its own existence through a re-inscription of its values into those of the *MBh/Rama*.

Beyond narrative authority and ideological control the question of transmission must also be considered. For these epics were orally transmitted and had their basis in folklore and ritual. They were, in short, an organic part of Indian culture, versions of which were quickly translated into vernacular languages and re-presented as their own.[1] This oral transmission (and transmutation) of the epics also meant that the epics quickly lost their links with an original, ur-text, becoming instead a heterogeneous collection of narratives/texts to which the mystified categories of 'original or primary text' or of 'source and ultimate meaning' could not be easily applied without considerable distortion. Yet the structure of the individual accretions (which may be read as 'texts' in their own right) did not disrupt the normative rules of the major narrative whose beginnings and ends were fixed. In the case of the *Mahabharata* it begins in general terms with the tale of Samtanu and ends with Yuddhisthira's return to the higher heavens; in the case of the *Ramayana* it begins with Rama's birth and ends with Sita's return to Mother Earth.

Yet my use of the term 'heterogeneity' acquires a distinctively oral

[1] See Kamil Bulke, *Ram-katha*, Prayag, Hindi Parisad, 1959, for a comprehensive account of the many versions of the *Ramayana*. Chief among them are Tulsidas' *Ramcaritamanasa* (Avadhi), Kamban's *Ramayana* (Tamil) and Krittivas Ojha's Bengali version.

134

2 I am indebted to A B Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 1960, for a theory of oral poetics.

3 I borrow this term from Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema*, London, Macmillan, 1981, p 13.

4 See *India: A Reference Manual*, Delhi, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1950-1982.

5 For the title of films I have adopted Bombay Cinema's own somewhat idiosyncratic but remarkably uniform orthography. Sanskrit transliterations have not been supplied with diacritical marks.

resonance when it comes to the actual production and re-presentation of episodes from the epic.[2] Each 'presentation' was an individual 'moment' with the vitual collapse of the discrete identities of singer and audience. Each 'presentation' as a 'moment' could be endlessly repeated with a variation in theme here or (more rarely) a metrical twist somewhere else. Meaningful only in terms of the major narrative syntagm of the epic and almost gratuitously repetitive, the 'moment' may be seen as a 'perpetual metonymy'[3], a play on a pre-existent totality, a confirmation, in a way, of the spectator's (and the subject's) desire to repeat.

Bombay Films too are moments of a grand narrative: each individual movie is a 'play' on the discursive practices which make up the 'other', unseen, movie as one massive unit. In short, the Bombay Film is one massive system with a series (incomplete) of specific actualisations. But the Bombay Cinema is also a pan-Indian social reality with a potential audience of something like 400 million. Produced in what is gradually becoming a distinctively Bombay Hindi, it is feverishly followed by enthusiastic Indians from every social class from Bombay to Calcutta, from Srinagar to Colombo. Overseas, this cinema is viewed on video, in the theatres, by yet another 4 million expatriate Indians.[4] Made unabashedly for popular consumption, it is perhaps the single most powerful cultural artefact of modern India: no change can take place without its tacit approval.

It is true that like any art form Bombay Cinema has produced its moments of 'otherness', its deconstructive forms which, for the purposes of this paper, I must ignore. Having quickly bracketed the subversive moments within the dominant form, I return to Bombay Film based on the 'song and dance' formula. And indeed this form may be deemed a genre in its own right. So what we have in fact is not simply one 'super' narrative but also one dominant genre whose rules are to be discovered in films from Phalke's *Raja Harischandra* (1913)[5] to the latest blockbuster from Bombay. Yet like any genre, a close examination of its various actualisations shows degrees and levels of self-reflexivity, an awareness, almost parodistic at times, of its own 'artificial totality'. Occasionally such self-consciousness throws up movies, ostensibly written in the dominant code, which destabilise the presumed monolithic totality of the genre. It is in them that a degree of contestation of form occurs and in movies such as *Aadharshila* (1981), *Chakra* (1980), *Manthan* (1981) and even *Bhavna* (1984), such contestation, dialogically, foregrounds the dominant genre as the 'other'. With these preliminary remarks, I should now like to return to the precursor text: the *MBh/Rama* as the great code of Bombay Cinema.

The Precursor Text

Both the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* belong to a pan-Indian meta-text and may be grouped collectively. And like the epic meta-text, Bombay Cinema too may be read as a palimpsest capable of endless expansion and repetition and like a palimpsest always betraying its

compositional form – the previous inscriptions are always visible upon close inspection. On the basis of such a conflation, I should like to claim that the *MBh/Rama* is finally a crucial 'founder of [Indian] discursivity'[6]. For, after all, it should be remembered that the Bombay Film is only one of many discursive practices which 'embed' themselves into the *MBh/Rama*. Narrative forms as varied as the *mathnavis*, the Indian bourgeois novel and Indian folk theatre retrieve the rules of their own formation from the *MBh/Rama*.[7]

To support this claim we must examine the precise nature of the *MBh/Rama* discourse. I propose to do that by examining two verses from the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* respectively. My aim is in fact to demonstrate how the precise rules even of filmic narrative are firmly embedded in passages as short as these. Furthermore, they demonstrate the themes of desire, *dharma* (Law), order and revenge which characterise Bombay films.

sa taya saha samgamya bharyaya kurunandana
panduh paramadharmatma yuyuje kaladharmana[8]

*(In the [enchanting] embrace of his wife he, Pandu, the joy of the Kurus, the foremost, upholder of **dharma**, was united with the Law of Time.)*

This is the description of Pandu's death in the *Mahabharata*. Pandu, brother of blind Dhritarastra, was condemned to suffer sexual abstinence all his life. Of his two wives Kunti had to cohabit with various demigods to produce three of his sons (Yudhisthira, Bhimasena and Arjuna), while Madri, his second wife, bore her children of the *ashvins* (the 'Horses'). Pandu, however, comes to his death because one strangely exciting day he finds the enchanting beauty of his wife Madri irresistible and ravishes her. As the malediction had combined sex with death, Pandu quickly dies as a consequence of his passion.

There is clearly a play on desire here: desire as both for the 'Other' (that is sex) or for the Self (that is preservation). But at a more fundamental level of discourse, the language itself is heavily marked by an excessive use of parataxis (without, that is, any grammatical signs of co-ordination or subordination). Pandu is described twice: once as *kurunandana* (the joy of the house of Kurus) and again as *paramadharmatma* (the foremost upholder of Law/*dharma*). There is no real subordination of these compounds to the subject; they belong co-extensively with Pandu. Similarly, death is opposed, both metrically and semantically, to *paramadharmatma* with the use of a parallel compound *kaladharmana* (the Law/*dharma* of Time/Death). The epic clearly wishes to bring the two kinds of *dharma* together but the form of representation adopted implicates a virtually continuous chain of referents. They are, in short, metonymic as the signifiers lack that total referentiality, the organic conflation of the signifier and the signified, found in metaphorical discourse. This descriptive system – a system marked by a high degree of parataxis and metonymy – is central to the discourse of the Bombay Film as well.

There is a further case of deferral which should be examined. The

[6] Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?' in J V Harari (ed), *Textual Strategies*, London, Methuen, 1980, pp 141-160.

[7] A number of these *mathnavis* were used by Homi Wadia during the '30s, '40s and '50s. Films like *Alibaba aur uske chalis chor, Aladin aur uska jadavi chirag, Husn ka chor* and many others were immensely popular. Among the Indian bourgeois novels may be mentioned B Bannerjee's *Pather Panchali*, Premchand's *Godan*, Phaneshvar Nath Renu's *Maila Acal* and Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*.

[8] *Mahabharata*, Poona Critical Edition, I, 116.12.

[9] Y Drivedi and L Jha (eds), *Ramayana*, Varanasi, 1967, IV, 18.11.

[10] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, (Hannah Arendt ed), London, Collins/Fontana Books, 1973.

passive form *yuyuje* ('was joined') and the unnecessarily repetitive *samgamya* ('in the embrace') mark a certain periphrastic detachment, a whole discourse of allusion, evasion and suggestion which again seems almost 'culture specific'. I must, however, accept the all too obvious linguistic fact that the middle voice in which *yuyuje* is inflected is a common feature of Sanskrit, and passive formations generally are not unusual. But the jump from syntax to meaning – that the passive and, by extension, the instrumental case imply a culture of deferral and allusion, 'the actor as acted upon and not acting' – should not be read as an academic quirk. The passive, demonstrably, governs filmic representation too. For it is the mode of discursivity itself rather than a continuous series of narrative displacement and/or extension which constitutes the essential structure of the Bombay Film.

te vayam dharmavibhrastam svadharme sthithah
bharatajnanam purakritya nigrihnimo yathavidihi [9]

(In following **dharma** *according to the dictates of Bharata, we punish evildoers as prescribed by Law.*)

Our second verse is from the episode which deals with the slaying of Bali, one of the more contentious episodes in the entire *Ramayana*. The question at issue here is fundamentally moral for, in death, Bali accuses Rama of dishonouring his own codes of *dharma*. In short, as Bali carefully argues, he was ignobly killed by Rama and this must surely be interpreted not only as cowardly but as *adharmika* (non-dharmic) by the world at large. Rama's answers reinforce the significance of order, the importance of an orderly transmission of power so that the ideology of caste and hierarchy remains intact. Not surprisingly, it is the signifier *dharma* again, the Law, which is given surplus value, is over-semanticised, given a degree of 'supervalency' in fact. Rama justifies his killing of Bali by invoking the 'permissibility' of his action within the Law (*dharma*). Under these conditions we punish (*nigrihnimah*) evil-doers; under these conditions, too, vengeance may be taken, killing may indeed be deemed rightful, even 'holy'.

The Bombay Film is firmly embedded in this mode of discursivity. To read the Bombay Film necessitates an initial understanding of this practice even when in many instances the practice itself has been significantly transformed. But our insights into Bombay Cinema will remain partial if we do not develop adequate hermeneutic models, themselves offshoots of a massive tradition of meta-textual commentaries on the epics, with which to read them. It is only then that we can re-insert Bombay Cinema into a continuous Indian cultural formation: the political democracy which, according to Benjamin, is heralded by the cinema needs no more articulate confirmation than Bombay Film. [10]

A useful starting point for an examination of the importance of genealogy in both the epics and in Bombay Cinema is, naturally, a filmic version of the epic. Genealogy is, after all, a fundamental feature of Indian culture, the orderly transmission of genes being so very crucial to the maintaining of caste and hierarchy: blood must never be polluted. Yet the epics do, in their own way, probe ways in which this patrilineal transmission of authority may be subverted. In the case of Pandu, who in fact fathered none of his children, the priestly commentators simply moved this very ordinary fact out of its historical context and transmuted it into the genealogy of demi-gods. In the absence of the Father – in the *MBh/Rama* he is either blind or impotent or languishes for a banished son – it is naturally the Mother who becomes dominant. That this happens in the film version of the epic (*Mahabharata* 1967) is not unusual given that Kunti, the Mother, is the only real genealogical anchor for the Pandavas in the epic.[11]

But the valorisation of the Mother and the foregrounding of a particular constellation of familial relationships in terms of the Mother (and not the Father) is fundamental to Bombay Cinema. In the film *Mahabharat*, this fetishisation of the category 'Mother' acquires considerable force. Upon the return of the Pandava brothers, the film pauses to highlight, dramatically, the Mother's directive to share whatever the brothers, singly or collectively, had won. As she is inside praying, she does not know that the object of this directive is Draupadi, the woman Arjuna had won at the *svayamvara* ('betrothal'). The Mother's word as Law and the Mother as the 'origin' of all genealogical secrets is further

[11] Used as absolute terms both Father and Mother begin with capital letters throughout.

Jai Santoshimaa: the Mother and her five sons.

shown in Kunti's final request to Karna (her son born of the Sun-god before she married Pandu) to save her five 'legitimate' sons in the great battle of Kuruksetra. The image of Mother-as-beggar is a reversal of Mother-as-word and is carefully counterpointed in the film. But the filmic mode consistently neutralises any suggestion of illegitimacy through a highly developed (though necessarily predictable) system of evasions. We get a version of the same genealogical problematic in one of the best-known Bombay films, Raj Kapoor's *Awara* (1951) where two kinds of structures may be found. The first is the epic structure of banishment: a wife is banished by a wealthy lawyer because he thinks she was defiled by the leader of a gang of dacoits who had kidnapped her on their honeymoon. The second is the whole question of patrimony as the lawyer refuses to recognise his wife's son as his own.

Together with the backdrop of Sita's banishment by Rama, the whole issue of 'fatherhood' is constantly replayed in Bombay Cinema. The answers which are invariably put forward always confirm the orderly nature of the genealogical transmission. Raj's father in *Awara* too finally acknowledges Raj to be his own son. At another level, genealogy often becomes 'Karmic', a continuous *mise-en-abyme* (receding mirror image), an endless series of reversals and 'cyclical detours'. In a film like *Mai tulsi teri agana ki* (1975) we find one of the more common instances of this genealogical reversal. The mother of one of the half-brothers in this film is a prostitute but it is her son who finally saves the family name from disgrace. The entry of the 'prostitute' again is important·for us as it creates yet another category (especially if the prostitute is mother too) with which the Bombay Film feels terribly uncomfortable. We apply the same notion of 'indirection' or 'evasion' we found at the level of discourse itself. The filmic prostitute is thus a prostitute as yet 'undefiled', one who escapes from the clutches of a matronly, plumpish, pimp just before her fate can be sealed that night. There is, therefore, a hint of that virginal purity which, in retrospect, makes her as perfect a mother as any. The central issue again is thus resolved not through specific instances of social 'determinations' but through an entry into a prescribed, formal system of abstraction. The half-brother's 'goodness' is ontologically given – his mother was, after all, not a real prostitute.

The moment genealogy enters particular social formations, the Bombay Film begins to feel terribly uneasy and rarely does it actually face up to the *reality* of an illegitimate child in a family. Genealogy affirms equilibrium, the return to orderly transmission of genes: genealogy, that is, defined at its crudest. In *Zanjeer* (1973) genealogy is shifted to the level of the Imaginary and exists only through specular identifications established by the viewing subject. Both Vijay, the hero, and Mala, the knife-grinder whom Vijay brings home, have no genealogical antecedents in the text. Both are, in this context, floating signifiers for whom genealogy must be re-constructed – and genealogy, as the *MBh/Rama* affirms, does not exist outside connections by blood. Now it may be that *Zanjeer* wishes to free the hero and heroine from the shackles of genealogical bondage so that, as free agents, their actions (*karma*) and their obligations to the Moral Law (*dharma*) are placed in

considerable relief. This is a legitimate argument and one, I am sure, the narrative endorses. Yet the freedom from genealogical constraints so given, enables realignments of the crucial filmic subjects with the viewing subject. Through a pre-symbolic form of identification, the viewer then re-constructs the very freedom that genealogy denies him in the Real so that genealogy now becomes a re-construction, a question of plenitude and lack, and not a given in the text.

These films often end up re-placing, re-focusing emphasis, rather than radically challenging the narrative authority of the precursor text, the *MBh/Rama*. Recent Bombay films like *Artha* (1983) face up to the whole basis of genealogy (and its over-valuation in Indian society generally) by stressing the strain on genealogical expectations placed by extra-marital affairs, divorce, second marriage and so on. There is perhaps a relatively large tradition of filmic contestations of this kind in the Bombay Film but generally even filmic narrative cannot handle the dis-economies created in any major shifting of basic Hindu social categories: a man/woman is either a Renouncer or a Man-of-the-World.

The Renouncer and the Man-of-the-World

'There are two kinds of men in Hindu India', wrote Louis Dumont over twenty years ago, 'those that live in the world and those that have renounced it.'[12] The opposition between *nivritti* ('renunciation') and *pravritti* ('worldliness') constitutes a major epistemological shift in Hindu thought which survives, in its various forms, to this day. Need-less to say, its ramifications in the Bombay Film too are considerable. A crucial filmic text with which I should like to develop my argument is *Zanjeer*. Here the opposition of *nivritti* and *pravritti* is re-worked at various levels. A first distinction may be made between the villains who are all men-of-the-world and the hero's 'jail-bird' father who upon hearing about the cause of his daughter's death during the period of his imprisonment (she died because the bootlegging company for which he worked had flooded the market with worthless pharmaceutical drugs) immediately renounces his erstwhile collaborators. He and his wife are, therefore, shot. His son escapes injury and is brought up in another household. He may be no more than the 'outsider' but cultural specifi-cities would dictate the reception of this 'outsider' as someone who situates himself outside the modern, bourgeois expression of *pravritti*. *Nivritti* is given another twist when the hero in *Zanjeer* is forced out of the police force because he is mistakenly suspected of bribery (the villains are responsible for this) and must, therefore, fight from outside the establishment. The heroine too, who is initially presented as a *churi-walla*, the 'knife-grinder', has no immediate relatives. The ironic potential of this is enormous for a prostitute in Hindi may be called *chappan-churi* ('fifty-six knives'). The third 'renouncer' in this triad is a Pathan who is won over by the hero because he, the Pathan, begins to respect Vijay as his equal in martial arts (a mixture of Bruce Lee and the street fighter). Yet the movie moves towards espousing a median between

[12] Louis Dumont, 'World Renunciation in Indian Religions', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, IV, 1960, pp 33-62.

[13] The erotic, wrote the Sanskrit aesthetician Mammata, is of two types: love in union and love in separation. See Mammata, *Kavya prakashah* (Acarya Vishveshvara ed), Varanasi, 1960, 4.29.

[14] It is interesting to note that in the Bombay Film the Mother is hardly ever around when a hero (or supporting hero) dies or leaves home for good. In *Sangam* (1964) there is no reference to Gopal's Mother before he shoots himself and in Gurudatt's *Pyasa* (1957) the poet's Mother dies before he leaves home with the prostitute Gulabo. *Lavaris, Shakti* and many more may be added to this list.

nivritti and *pravritti*, both of which through their symbolic representation by the hero's world and the villain's world respectively are shown to be excesses. In other words, the filmic narrative opts for a gentle balance situated right in the midst of the hero who becomes an exemplar of this mediation.

Any significant archaeology of the 'renouncer' in Bombay film would necessitate an analysis of two character-types. The first is the hero 'estranged', one whose higher sense of duty requires a radical act of estrangement from the woman he loves.[13] All popular Bombay actors must do this and all we have to do is construct a syntagm of actors of the past thirty or so years to demonstrate this: Dilip Kumar blinds himself after he has actually seen for himself that Nargis does not recognise him in *Deedar*. Both Raj Kapoor and Devanand in films like *Mera nam joker* and *Bambai ka babu* respectively lose the women they love. Raj Kapoor loses all three of them, perhaps a neat projection of the many loves in his own real life. In *Sangam* the renouncer is Rajendra Kumar, the hero's friend (whose girl he too loves) and an actor who thoroughly enjoyed roles oozing with melancholy and self-pity. Of the more recent matinee idols Rajesh Khanna was, for a while, constantly in a state of *vipralambha* or 'estrangement' (*Amar prem, Amardeep, Daag,* etc) and Amitabh Bacchan too in an interesting movie like *Silsila* (1982) sacrifices his love for duty towards another woman. We can only hint at these because the issue really involves an intricate set of signifiers which are produced through popular demand and media publicity. In Hindi one speaks of the *bicara* complex, the complex of self-pity (or, more positively, a version of 'the tragic sense') which produces a melancholic individual capable of singing some highly sentimental songs.

The second character-type is clearly the Mother. The archetypal Mother is Nargis of *Mother India* (1957). The filmic Mother often renounces everything for the sake of her husband or son. A husband may abuse her, a son may leave her (which sons do not do all that often) but she remains steadfast, the ultimate beacon that guides erratic ships to safety. So when a Mother renounces her own son (which is rare) or her husband (which is rarer still) the sheer emotional weight of all this is enormous. So Kunti's plea for the lives of her 'five legitimate sons' in the *Mahabharata* also implies an act of monumental renunciation – Karna must die as a consequence. Similarly, Nargis must shoot her son Birju (Sunil Dutt) in *Mother India* because her son had subverted codes that transcend filial obligations, codes indeed of *dharma* itself. The moment she shoots her son dead, she is canonised, becomes, in short, a supermother, that terrible renouncer who is at once Mother and Kali. It is a prospect that the Bombay Film often tries to avoid either through the simultaneous death of the Mother and son or through some other form of 'indirection'.[14]

Mother India also problematises the role of hero-as-renouncer as Birju's radical renunciation is not so much an act of personal retreat from the affairs of the world but a revolutionary onslaught on the very structures that support and buttress the man-of-the-world: the feudal orders of Indian peasant society. He revolts against a system that

Mother India: the actress Nargis as the archetypal Mother.

perpetuates inequities and traps the Indian peasant into eternal servitude. But his error is that he wishes to abduct and ravish the landlord's daughter as an act of vengeance. It is here that the biological Mother whose duty is to her son becomes Durga or Bhavani, upholder of *dharma*, the codes that maintain Hinduism. In such situations, the Bombay film feels happier with a hero whose Mother is dead so that some codes may be subverted without the fear of a Mother's wrath. *Zanjeer* and *Silsila* both either negate or down-play the Mother, and the Mother in *Awara* too must not be allowed to face up to the consequences of her son's profligacy and vagabondage.

More recently in movies like *Artha* which perhaps only marginally belong to the genre of Bombay Film, a more radical shift in representation of the Mother may be detected. *Artha* in fact proposes to alter the Bombay 'frame of reference' with regard to the Mother by proposing the category Woman, a fact which in many ways comes closer to the original dramatisation of women in the epics – Satyavati, Lunti and even Sita are Women first and Mothers only susbsequently. Of course, they have not been received in this fashion by Indian culture, especially as the semiotic system of *dharma* has denied Mother-as-Woman an independent voice. One need only remember that a wife is always called a *dharmapatni* (the wife of *dharma*).

The Dharmic Text

At one crucial level the precursor text of the Bombay Film is the *MBh/Rama* as a treatise on *dharma*. The term *dharma* covers a wide semantic field including morality, religion, duty, justice, virtue and so

on and so forth. The ideology of *dharma* is variously manipulated by the filmic text. The film version of the epic, for instance, reads *dharma* extensively as a religious code which gains its significance from Krishna himself. This happens quite naturally because so many commentators have tried to give the *Mahabharata* a textual status indistinguishable from other religious texts. A more radical example of this is the *Ramayana* which, through its many vernacular versions, has almost become a *dharmashastra* (a Bible). I should like to interpret *dharma* a bit more loosely here so as to accommodate the varying degrees of political adjustment that the Bombay Film has had to make over the years. But insofar as the 'cultural specificity' of the Bombay Film is concerned, it resides squarely in its appropriation/distortion/confusion of essentially dharmic categories and this, I have argued, is the crucial hermeneutic model for the study of the Bombay Film.

One of the invariables, however, is the way in which *dharma* is finally read as fidelity to its, the film industry's own, conception of what constitutes a stable bourgeois world-order. Behind the rhetoric of *dharma*, whether it is the rationale of the Mother's shooting of Birju or the ritualistic purification of a prostitute in a temple before the hero can marry her as in B R Chopra's *Sadhana* (1959), lies a naked ideological motive. I suspect that this has to do as much with the survival of particular kinds of script-writers, producers, directors, singers, musicians and so forth as with the truth value of *dharma* itself. In making the essential conflict a dharmic one, the forms of resolution become quite naturally pre-textual and hence, in a curious way, a justification for the film industry's own existence: the film too, finally, has a matrix enshrined in all Indian texts.

Dharma then is both the impetus and a screen that hides the blatant inconsistencies inherent at all levels in the filmic text. What it hides, furthermore, are the very processes of monopoly and exploitation which produce the text. The illusory unity of the text achieved sometimes through an excessive demonstration of the grammar of *dharma* (as in *Swami*) is no more than a systematic ploy aimed at avoiding a degree of self-consciousness about the filmic 'act/labour' in these movies. These are the features which movies like *Artha* and *Aadharshila* propose to deconstruct. This may be the beginning of a massive deconstruction of the hermeneutic models I have advanced in this paper too.

The Parallel Text

The 'reader' of the filmic text has two large sub-texts which must be handled simultaneously. The first is the epic text, the text that has accrued around the *MBh/Rama*. This text is crucial both in terms of the forms of discursive practices employed by the films and in terms of the hermeneutic models into which it positions itself. The hierarchy of models (from dharmic perhaps to genealogical) raised in this paper may, therefore, be legitimately superimposed upon the filmic text. The second sub-text is a parallel text which may be called the 'actor-text' or

to give it a useful Hindi equivalent, the *Kalakar-shastra*. In other words, what now must be probed, albeit very generally, is the concept of actor as a text.

I would like to explore this concept of the 'parallel text' through the figure of the Bombay actor Amitabh Bacchan, whose film career spans fifteen years (1969-1984). In the wake of the Rajiv Gandhi brand of Indian populism, Bacchan, like a number of other Bombay Cinema actors and actresses (Sunil Dutt, Vijayanthimala, etc) is now a Congress Party parliamentarian. He made his impact on the Bombay screen around 1970 with his portrayal of the doctor of a terminal cancer patient. The film was *Anand* in which the central role was played by Rajesh Khanna, for a brief period India's most popular movie star.[15] There are a large number of biographical facts – real and apocryphal – which add to the Indian response to these actors – their marriages, love affairs, etc – but invoking them here would simply complicate our already difficult sub-text.

In *Anand*, Amitabh Bacchan has a supporting role which he fulfils with considerable tact and involvement. A curious comment (perhaps the author's anyway but perhaps suggested by Bacchan) is of not inconsiderable interest to us. As a doctor he tends people living in city ghettos but casually remarks, on one occasion, the impossible job of a doctor in India if every death is inevitably followed by at least another birth. Heroes don't say this in Indian cinema – but then the doctor is not the hero of *Anand*. Still, the movie begins to counterpoint Rajesh Khanna with his *bicara*-complex and Amitabh Bacchan with all the marks of a hero in rebellion. The rebellious figure is not unusual in Bombay Cinema; both K L Saigal and Raj Kapoor had defied some of the basic codes of Indian society. In *Awara*, for instance, Raj Kapoor had in fact used the urban *gunda* (the 'hooligan' associated with the Indian metropolis) to positive effect. Thus Amitabh Bacchan was already inscribing himself into the actor-text of a 'deviant'/'disruptive' tradition in films. It was a minor tradition (the tradition of Karna), not greatly at odds with the 'Rama hero', which occasionally reminded audiences of a certain subversive element which has always been present in Indian narrative.

My interest in Amitabh Bacchan arises straight out of this. I read him as a 'sub-text' which destabilises the 'positive' continuities we have detected in filmic discourse. But the 'sub-text' becomes a fully-fledged parallel text and displaces the filmic text itself: the actor becomes the film. The recent brouhaha over Amitabh's accident on the set of a movie (*Coolie*), which led to Indira Gandhi's visit to the hospital, a blind child's offer of his life in place of the actor's and urban billboards proclaiming 'God is Great Amit is Back', has all the marks of a 'narrative' in its own right. The crucial filmic text in his career was, however, *Zanjeer* and I should like to return to that movie now.

The immediate antecedents of *Zanjeer* are films on the theme of revenge such as *Baradari* and *Samrat*. In a way the narratives of both the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* too may be read as propelled by a need for vengeance: the Pandavas seek vengeance because they are cheated,

15 See K A Abbas, *I am not an Island: An Experiment in Autobiography*, New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, 1977, pp 485ff, for an interesting account of Amitabh Bacchan.

their 'wife' Draupadi ridiculed; Rama because Ravana 'ravishes' Sita. The moral justification for revenge goes back to Rama's words to the dying Bali. Yet *Zanjeer* internalises 'revenge' through a dream-text which dominates the entire work. It is true that this fills no more than a few frames of the film, but it is a highly polysemic dream-text. I have briefly commented on its filmic antecedents. It is important to recall also the importance of the *ashvamedha* ('horse sacrifice') and the *ashvins* ('the twin-horse headed gods') generally in Indian consciousness and their centrality in Indian mythology. There is also, however, a much more complex role of the horse which we have not touched upon but which surfaces in the filmic text through a quite fascinating series of signifiers of castration and/or potency. For the play with the phallus of the horse in the *ashvamedha* is crucial to a more comprehensive understanding of the highly ambiguous horse symbology in Indian culture.

In *Zanjeer*, as we point out in a forthcoming study of this movie[16], the first representation of the *'ashva* nightmare' is a twice repeated shot of the horseman crossing the frame left to right. This is a slightly unusual form of 'Bombay representation' because the Bombay Film normally codifies such sequences through repeat zooms as in the 'flash visions' of Rishi Kapoor in *Karz* (1980). For us the significance of the shot is as a motif in the movie which alludes to the 'charm' on the villain's bracelet on the night on which he slaughters the hero's parents. As a child, the hero saw this from the closet where he was hiding. Moreover, this may be considered as a narrative 'event' unifying the revenge narrative of the film through the kinds of multiple signification we have suggested in this paper, i.e., the inter-text of Bombay movies with horsemen and, more significantly, the various transformations of the horse in Indian mythology.

More importantly, though, this 'event' could be related to the concept of the parallel text. From *Zanjeer* onwards – and *Zanjeer* now pushes the actor Amitabh Bacchan forward through a highly symbolic conjunction of actor and the 'symbolic horse' – Amitabh Bacchan becomes a complex 'text' in his own right, sanctioned by mythology and responding to a need for rebelliousness in the restless Indian lower middle classes (the target population of the Indian film industry as a whole). It becomes readily obvious that any number of Amitabh Bacchan films – *Sat Hindustani, Barsat ki ek rat, Adalat, Hera pheri, Lavaris, Imam dharam, Khun pasina, Silsila, Shakti, Inquilab, Coolie, Sharabi, Naseeb*, etc – may be read through a sub-text called 'Amitabh Bacchan', constructed in turn through the dual process of the 'materiality' of filmic production, and audience reception. In all these movies the filmic subjects get subsumed by a larger than life text. The 'authority' and the 'author' of these films, if these terms may be read as 'a principle of grouping of discourses, conceived as the unity and origin of their meanings, as the focus of their coherence'[17] rather than as the physical 'originator' of the text (as 'screenplay writer', 'director', etc), are therefore to be located squarely at the interface of 'actor as text' and the Bombay Film as the complex discourse this paper has outlined. Once one projects this version of the 'authority of the text', one may also advance, parallel to the narrative

[16] Vijay Mishra, Peter Jeffery, Brian Shoesmith, 'Zanjeer and Bombay Film', work-in-progress, Murdoch University.

[17] Michel Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', in Robert Young (ed), *Untying the Text*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981, p 48.

Naseeb: Amitabh Bacchan as the angry young man of the Indian lower middle classes.

inter-texts, a concept of 'actor inter-text'. In *Zanjeer*, and for Bombay Cinema generally, this 'actor inter-text' is essential to an understanding of the total reception of the movie – the fact that there is also an ideal Indian reader of the filmic text too.

Conclusion

Any theoretical critique of Bombay Cinema must begin with a systematic analysis of the grand Indian meta-text and 'founder of [Indian] discursivity', namely the *MBh/Rama*. This pre-requisite is not just an intellectual ploy, it is the 'minimal' starting point for a systematic analysis of this massive cultural artefact. No grammar of the Bombay Film can be established with any certainty nor will it stand up to close scrutiny unless the basic structure of this meta-text is firmly grasped. Beyond this the exercise becomes purely interpretative and here I have suggested 'received' ways in which this cinema may be tackled. These interpretative models open up ways in which the genre itself may be finally deconstructed. Yet every text, every genre, every cultural form also has its own history of reception, its own 'moments' of struggle and contestation and these 'moments' too require intensive treatment. This article has made some significant gestures towards them, especially insofar as it has given some primacy to a whole new 'parallel text' which must be constructed.

Ultimately, however, the presumed totality of the genre can be no more than illusory. Already movies like *Artha, Mandi, Masoon*, etc, throw up age-old contradictions which require redress. They gradually begin to fragment the culture's cherished assumptions about order, sexuality and so on. The departures from the normative rules of an imperialistic discourse in such movies are adequate warning that the collapse of the genre may not be too far away. The margins gradually begin to acquire prominence, the absences a presence, the silences a

voice: that which had been marginalised begins to assert itself. If a critique of the Bombay Film is going to be successful it must now pay as much attention not simply to the rules of the discourse (my initial contention) but also to the 'other' that this very discourse very conveniently silenced.

THE TENTH INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL OF INDIA: SCATTERED REFLECTIONS AROUND AN EVENT

BY ASHISH RAJADHYAKSHA

The criticism of the tenth International Film Festival of India presented here may appear to be unnecessarily harsh. The opposing, more commonly expressed viewpoint is that, given the situation, little more could reasonably have been expected. Apart from the political issue of deciding to what extent a debate is possible and to what extent a situation should be taken as 'given', there are at least three reasons that make fundamental criticism particularly necessary.

First, the event itself, i.e. its Event-ness: the very strong tendency to build an enormous justification for several official policies in art upon the *fact* of its being organised. Secondly, the crisis of all institutions such as the IFFI in the wake of drastic changes in national mass media. I believe that several shifts now are taking place in attitudes towards entertainment and art in India and beyond. Therefore, to take a situation as 'given', to accept a status quo in the act of organising such an event, is to accept imminent extinction of even the felt 'need' for such events. Finally, this year may see an unprecedented exposure of Indian cinema in Western, non-commercial situations. There are three major 'seasons' of Indian cinema, one at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, one at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and one in

Pesaro. For some of the organisers of these seasons, Delhi was the basis for certain attitudes on Indian film; indeed, to frame such attitudes is increasingly considered a main task of the IFFI/Filmotsav. The Western response has always been crucial to the survival of a significant tradition in Indian film, which perhaps makes it particularly crucial that the terms of debate be at least partially concretised.

I. New Delhi: the site, less than two months before the gala opening of the Festival on January 3, 1985, of some of the most gruesome riots India has seen since Independence. Over a thousand innocent Sikhs were killed and a hundred thousand rendered homeless by deliberate acts of violence and arson led in some instances by ruling party members of Parliament. Even to Indians the contradictions are becoming evident – Luchino Visconti's retrospective was held at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, within the very complex that housed Indira Gandhi's bullet-ridden corpse less than seven weeks ago. It opened with *The Damned. . . .*

II. An 'international' festival: an Event. After the Asian Games, organised by the Indian government two years ago, there has come to be a certain notion of the *Event* – a periodic

demonstration by the State of organised efficiency and technological spectacle, with much media coverage, the implicit idea being to rid ourselves of the Third Worldist taint, and project ourselves as an 'emerging', vital, efficient nation.

The Tenth International Film Festival happened to be the first such Event in New Delhi after Rajiv Gandhi came to power in a landslide victory at the Parliamentary election. The new government has been openly courting advertising men and multinational investment in the economy as well as giving a crucial role in its thrust for 'modernisation' to a vastly growing commercial mass media. The IFFI was thus doubly 'significant' – in itself, as a Show, an international cultural event; and, dealing with film, in its concerns for media, as the yet-powerful film industry bosses are being pressured to toe the government line. IFFI's 'internationalism' is of course eminently questionable. It is nowhere near being a genuinely international event, but the 'international' is repeatedly evoked as a powerful 'other', a nebulous arbitrator of several factional battles being fought out in the country. Two weeks of hectic, mind-bending exposure to 'world cinema', a 'trade meet', an expression of 'international amity', IFFI is all things to all people concerned with the cinema in India. As such, the 'international' is an important signifier.

III. Halfway through the Festival came the figures for the seventh five-year plan for media: out of a total of Rs 2809 crore (£ 1755.6 million), 49% goes to radio, 44.2% to television, 1.8% to all requirements concerning cinema. The NFDC (National Film Development Corporation), the government agency for producing films and the sole option for an alternate cinema in India, has Rs 5 crore (£3.5 million) for the next five years.

On the other hand, in a major operation being rammed through with the utmost priority, 70% of the Indian population is to be reached through television by the middle of the year. In the blue-print, TV decisively replaces film as the centre of mass culture. The new sponsors are the large private sector, the model openly acknowledged is the Mexican one. The most successful soap-opera indigenously manufactured, *Hum Log*, beamed nationwide three times a week, is sponsored by Nestlé. The implications should be evident, as also – given an open Latin American parallel – the pressures.

IV. There is no material 'need' therefore to organise a film festival at all. The functions are, again in the form of organisation, implied – a universal set of functions 'common to festivals everywhere'. The tenth IFFI is supposed to cater to a 'serious' audience, and also function as a 'meet': between industrymen, government officials, film-makers, producers, journalists and festival delegates from abroad. Seeing the interaction, one is led into that labyrinthine distilling system that separates 'good' cinema from the rest. I suppose it happens everywhere, but here one can see consecutive 'Information' screenings of *Silkwood*, Dos Santos' *Memories of Prison*, Resnais' *L'Amour à Mort*, Altman's *Come Back to the Five & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean* and the Korean *Firebird Bog* – all under the ubiquitous heading of 'good cinema'.

I mention this particularly because, as a result of a growing crisis in the commercial market following the video crisis and the increasing governmental control over export of films, the Information and Broadcasting Minister has turned into a veritable Czar, promising largesse to the commercial industry that has begun sighting the end of an era, and getting it to toe the official TV line. As a result, almost everyone making films at all claims for himself (in India, never herself) a social role, a developmental interest and, of course, the label of 'art'. It is getting virtually impossible to have anything like a broad consensus, in film and TV, on what constitutes a commercial product. IFFI goes a long way in promoting this notion of 'good cinema' *per se*, being the sole point of exposure of foreign films to an Indian audience (other than the almost-dead distribution market), and maintaining its 'aura' as a cultural Event.

And so, there were *seven* retrospectives – Alexander Korda, Luchino Visconti, Shohei Imamura, Nikita Mikhalkov, KA Abbas, Puttana Kanagal, and the Tamil star (and Member of Parliament) Shivaji Ganeshan. There was also a Focus on Latin American cinema, mixing – in the Brazilian instance – Ruy Guerra and Glauber Rocha with films like *Bye Bye Brazil* and *Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands*. Both the last-mentioned films created a repeated riot situation with thousands of people (having heard of some 'sexy' scenes in them) turning up for tickets. The producer, Bruno Barretto, spoke at a seminar on

Latin American cinema, expressing the need to 're-appropriate television' to 'communicate our message', to develop the 'efficiency' of the North Americans; he also mentioned the oppressiveness of aesthetics before the more urgent problems of sustaining an industry. Barretto, I gather, is an influential producer with some official clout in his country. Clearly Brazil has similar problems to our own in India.

Likewise the competition section itself, including Francesco Rosi's *Carmen*, Dos Santos' *Memories of Prison* and Tomas Gutierrez Alea's *Up to a Point*. But the film that won the first prize was James Ivory's *The Bostonians*. It shared this honour with a Russian film called *A Ruthless Romance*. The question is hardly whether Ivory's film is a 'good' film or not; surely it concerns the fact that, when a festival awards its top prize to a certain film, it also demonstrates the kind of cinema it wishes to support. The IFFI, viewing itself, seems to be completely concerned with just what sort of an image it projects to (Western) media, what its – to use an advertising term – unique selling proposition is. The roots of such an analysis – which takes place every year after the festival – usually centre around the 'Third World' emphasis, for one major position is to link India's cultural policy with its efforts to emerge as a major voice of the non-aligned 'oppressed'. An analysis which gives priority to a vague concern with 'image' over the pressing need to sustain a vitally important movement linking film as an art form to contemporary Indian art and doesn't even allow for an effective 'trade meet' concentrating on getting the industry out of its marketing crisis, is manifestly inadequate. But still the IFFI organisers seem reluctant to rethink the event's basic function both within India and in relation to the West.

V. Viewing the Indian cinema: an excerpt from the Parliament-appointed Committee on Public Undertakings (COPU) Report on the Film Finance Corporation, 1976:

The Committee note ... that the (Film Finance) Corporation keeps the following criteria in view for granting loans to filmmakers:
1. *Human interest in the story;*
2. *Indianness in theme and approach;*
3. *Characters with whom the audience can identify;*

4. *Dramatic content; and*
5. *Background and capability of the applicant.*
The Committee are of the view that there is no inherent contradiction between artistic films of good standing and films successful at the box-office, and that films should combine quality with public acceptability. ...

It doesn't look like things have changed since those criteria were proposed. The NFDC still produces/finances films the same way, and selects films for the festival's Indian Panorama with the same criteria. What is extremely frustrating is the fact that even foreign critical responses – even from those who ought to know better – are obsessed by notions of 'Indianness' and 'human interest' and 'dramatic content'.

The Indian films in the Panorama, which did show some of the most important films of the past year, reveal a clearly stifling situation. Made against near-insurmountable odds of production and exhibition, every film has somehow to rise over the welter of cultural junk that surrounds it to arrive at an identity that would let it make its way in a market that is in itself now a shambles. The consequences of an extraordinarily short-sighted official position on the cinema over the past 30 years are now coming through loud and clear: there has never been an effort to create a stable, open market for distribution and today, there is no effort to bail out the commercial industry from its deep crisis. There have been, as a result, no valid genres established outside of what now comes to be called the 'All-India' film – of songs, dances, fights, sentiment, drama – and consequently a terrible struggle for individual authors.

Tarang, directed by Kumar Shahani, was in the Panorama. I have for long supported Shahani's work as the most important in the Indian cinema today. His effort to locate his theme, based in the urban industrial situation, within the tradition of the classical epics is one of redefining materialist traditions and their forms of articulation into the schism of contemporary urban consciousness. Taking types, and thus references to a dominant generic language, he individuates them, extends their 'presence' into the larger archetype and – crucially – seeks a resolution on the mythic level, believing there to be no contradiction between mythic consciousness and material praxis.

Tarang, which combines contemporary industrial India and classical archetypes.

Shahani's work with mythic signification has influenced almost all of the new Indian cinema. However, those who have accepted this also failed to take account of its classical dimensions, neglecting the stress on the anchorage in the contemporary material/cultural base, as well as the historical relation to a classical tradition.

Director Ketan Mehta's second feature *Holi* (Festival of Fire) is one instance. A long, improvised, anarchic film on student violence on campus, *Holi* is ambitious enough to plumb some of the depths of urban lumpenism today. Its extended trolley movements and complete use of the on-the-spot recorded pilot track (including, miraculously, two songs) make for a gradual take-off in which the escalating rhythm of violence, and the final grotesque 'sacrifice' of the student killing himself, build up with a definite logic. But there is something very dangerous in the way Mehta refuses to distance himself from the rhythm, having entered it: he actually 'postpones' reflection upon the experience until after the film is over, leaving the aesthetic enjoyment of the violence untouched and complete. The mythic dimensions are clearly worked out – the orgiastic 'ritual' of the festival of Holi, the associations with fire and destructiveness (book burning, the frustrations and their extension into sexuality), the 'sacrifice' which is very much a part of the ritual. But he has no patience with the narrative forms of mythic organisation.

The politics of urban experience, its inevitable aspect, is in itself the subject matter of several films. *Mohan Joshi Hazir Ho!* ('Mohan Joshi Goes to Court'), directed by Saeed Akhtar Mirza, is politically strident, linked entirely into the here-and-now of a definite situation, formally a bizarre pastiche of commercial film ingredients linked together with caricature and gross images drawn at times from the commercial cinema. (The 'villain' here is played by Amjad Khan, who plays the bandit in that massive blockbuster *Sholay* and is a very well-known screen 'type'; here he stands behind garish bars, eats leg of chicken and has lather dripping over his slavering jaws to suggest his villainy as the upper-class landlord of the ghetto.) There is, however, something genuine in the chaos, which relates to the bizarre in urban living, although its Brechtian claims do not, I think, hold.

But no such justification can be extended to the appallingly cynical *Party*, directed by Govind Nihalani. An upper-upper-class party, where a pleasure-loving leisure class enjoy the evening discussing here Salman Rushdie, there regional theatre, with Husain paintings hanging in the backdrop – all is counterpointed neatly against the notion of an 'alternate' reality, of the political activist taking up weapons and going into the jungles to revolutionise the peasantry and tribal groups. The whole thing deviates rapidly into a morbid expressionism, which is increasingly an easy avenue for several Indian film-makers, but it's worse here because *Party* is completely exploitative of almost every notion of significance – politics, organisation, art, even human dignity.

Mukha Mukham ('Face to Face') has similar problems, though I would never question director Adoor Gopalakrishnan's intentions in the way I would Nihalani's. But the deviations are evident: it claims to be an apolitical chronicle of a political era in Left organisation in Kerala. It takes up the instance of one Comrade, Shreedharam, a fictitious character, against the backdrop of '60s Kerala politics, but in depoliticising these events, gets so involved with the individual subjectivity of one man, that again that overpoweringly expressionist tendency recurs – here suggested by the representation of his drinking, sleeping and, eventually, death.

There weren't any other films of independent interest. The tendency towards regional grouping, which I maintain to be an extremely dangerous policy[1], is being persevered with. I do think it would help even areas that may as yet not have a cinematic tradition of their own to relate to their own material history if film were seen in the light of a more significant movement than merely as an object of cultural/anthropological-interest .

VI. There seems to be increasing pressure from foreign responses, however, to keep this 'film-as-object-of-anthropological interest' attitude alive. I think this is part of the pressure to find viewpoints towards the 'fascinating' in a strange region that are *not* contemporary and international. Strange arguments – a representative of the Hawaii Festival said their festival motto was 'Where Strangers Meet', and hence Herzog's *Where the Green Ants Dream* was a perfect film for her to screen. When some of us expressed a very different reaction to it, she replied 'Oh, that's so interesting, to get a Third World response to Herzog!' Another, a British distributor of Indian films, wanted to know the 'purpose' of making Indian films as art if they would not 'sell' in the international market.

Increasingly, festival organisers from the West are taking extremely conservative stands – which may extend from taking rank commercial, lumpen films like Manmohan Desai's work, and putting them on display as something significant, to asking for 'Indian' ethnicist cinema. This pressure is so great that a large part of the IFFI has begun actively tailoring its own publicity to cater to such 'ethnicism'.

Right now, with the three major expositions of Indian films in the West being planned – in Paris, New York and Pesaro – the emphasis seems to be on a 'representative' selection, a major aspect of which would be the commercial cinema. In the absence of an attitude informed by a more coherent analysis of India and its contemporary situation, and of the reflection of that situation in its art, the label 'Indian cinema' is often merely a European construction of 'India' as seen through the eyes of those fascinated by Orientalism. There is no real justification, I think, to group films merely because they all happen to come from the same sub-continent. This is equally true, I think, of notions of 'African cinema', 'Caribbean cinema' or 'Latin American cinema': none of these notions any longer signifies a movement or indeed anything other than the cinema from a geographical region which is culturally/politically 'fascinating'.

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[1] See 'Filmotsav '84 (2)', *Framework*, 25, 1984, pp 104-108.

The politics of urban experience: *Mohan Joshi Hazir Ho!* (left) and *Party*.

BLACK CINEMAS, FILM THEORY AND DEPENDENT KNOWLEDGE

BY ROBERT CRUSZ

The dominant tradition's seemingly recent discovery of 'otherness' with regard to film practice and theory reveals the ideological hegemony of this tradition and ultimately, in relation to black cinemas, its underlying racism. This issue of *Screen* devoted to other cinemas reflects and carries on the hegemonic activity by providing, through its position of power, a space whereby 'the process' can take place, 'of securing the legitimacy and assent of the subordinated to their subordination'[1]. By bringing other cinemas into its arena on its own terms to discuss, among other things, the relevance or otherwise of existing film theories to other practices, the hegemonic tradition continues to ensure its domination.

I do not intend re-working in depth the debates on the concepts of 'ideology', Gramscian 'hegemony' and 'ideological cultural apparatuses' in order to substantiate my claim that current theoretical film journals are part of the ideological hegemonic activity: *Screen* readers are familiar with the concepts and the debates. Stuart Hall analyses and inter-relates these concepts carefully.[2] I will use sections of his argument to illustrate my point.

Within our specific social formation ideological hegemony is achieved through the consensus of 'the agencies of the superstructures – the family, education system, the church, the media and cultural institutions, as well as the coercive side of the state – the law, the police, the army ...'[3]. Also, no one unified ruling class sustains this hegemony, rather it is supported by 'a particular conjunctural alliance of class fractions; thus the content of dominant ideology will reflect this

complex interior formation of the dominant classes'[4]. In relation to black cinemas, theoretical and other film journals like *Screen, Undercut, Views, Framework, Sight and Sound,* belong to this 'complex interior formation' of the dominant, the 'alliance of class fractions' and are part of the superstructures of the education system and the media and cultural institutions of a racist society.

Hegemony is not permanent; it has to be won and secured in history. There is no total incorporation of the dominated groups within the hegemonic structure. These groups retain their distinctive identities and their own specific ideological practices, yet they are contained, because, 'when these subordinated classes are not strong or sufficiently organised to represent a "counter hegemonic" force to the existing order, their own corporate structures and institutions can be used, by the dominant structure (hegemonized), as a means of enforcing their continued subordination'[5]. Hall cites the example of trade unions being used in this way – 'confining its' (the working class) 'opposition

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[1] Stuart Hall. 'Culture, the Media and the Ideological Effect' in James Curran et al (eds), *Mass Communication and Society,* London, Open University, 1977, pp 388-339.

[2] ibid, pp 315-348.

[3] ibid, p 333.

[4] ibid.

[5] ibid.

within limits which the system can contain'[6].
The ACTT's Workshop Declaration needs to be
placed within this scenario as should useful
discussions containing statements like:

*Next are the workshops themselves and how they
work: workers' collectives with people coming in
with some training at that kind of artisanal level.
Those ways of working are particularly good for
people who have previously been disenfranchised –
such as women and ethnic minorities – because a lot
of it is actually building up confidence'.*[7]

The film union's recognition of workshops
places oppositional voices in contained spaces
firstly within its own hegemonic structure and
then, through itself, within the wider structure.
This containment is justified by claims that it is
'particularly good' in order to build up
'confidence'. Why can't confidence be built
within the mainstream? The answer to this will
explain why the film industry is sexist and racist.

   In order that a hegemonic structure can
continue to dominate, it should achieve a
'complementarity'[8] between itself and the
subordinate groups; i.e., given that the different
subordinate groups are never completely
immersed within the dominant structure and that
struggle is always present, an 'equilibrium' has
to be reached 'so that whatever are the
concessions the ruling "bloc" is required to
make to win consent and legitimacy, its
fundamental basis will not be overturned'[9]. The
Workshop Declaration is one such concession.
Special issues of theoretical film journals are
another. What is more, dominant groups have to
represent their particular interests as 'general
interests'[10] in which all groups have an equal
stake. Thus by restricted unionisation black
groups are involved in the class struggle. There
is no problem for us here. But whether we will
have an opportunity to effectively and
successfully address racism in the labour
movement remains to be seen. By publishing
special issues on other cinemas, the dominant
theoretical traditions make their particular
concerns a matter of general interest in which all
others have a stake. Whether regular debate on
issues outside the paradigms of the dominant
traditions and of particular interest to black film-
makers will be given space, remains to be seen.

   Hall identifies the mass media as 'ideological
apparatuses'[11] and describes three crucial

'cultural functions' of these 'apparatuses'. These
functions could be attributed to other 'cultural
institutions' like theoretical film journals. The
first function is

*the provision and the selective construction of social
knowledge, of social imagery, through which we
perceive the 'worlds', the 'lived realities' of others,
and imaginarily reconstruct their lives and ours into
some intelligible 'world-of-the-whole', some 'lived
totality'.*[12]

   In this special issue, *Screen* is involved in the
'selective construction' of a 'knowledge' about
other cinemas in order to 'perceive the "worlds",
the "lived realities"' of these cinemas and to
reconstruct them into the totality of its particular
concerns.

*In regions, classes and sub-classes, in cultures and
sub-cultures, neighbourhoods and communities,
interest groups and associative minorities, varieties
of life-patterns are composed in bewildering
complexity.... The second function of the modern
media is to reflect and **reflect on** this plurality; to
provide a constant inventory of the lexicons, life-
styles and ideologies which are objectivated there.*[13]

   In their time dominant film theories have
reflected and reflected on the pluralities of film-
making and have provided an 'inventory' of 'the
lexicons, life-styles and ideologies' of these
practices. 'Other cinemas' is just another
addition to this inventory. But what is significant
is that this inclusion of other cinemas in the
dominant inventory legitimises these cinemas

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[6] ibid.

[7] Maureen McCue, quoted in '"Training" the Independents',
Screen November-December 1984, vol 25 no 6, p 9.

[8] Stuart Hall, op cit, p 334.

[9] ibid.

[10] ibid.

[11] ibid, p 340.

[12] ibid, pp 340-341.

[13] ibid, p 341.

theoretically and intellectually and makes them acceptable.

The third function of the media ... is to organize, orchestrate and bring together that which it has selectively represented and selectively classified. Here, however fragmentarily and plurally, some degree of integration and cohesion, some imaginary coherence and unities must begin to be constructed. What has been made visible and classified begins to shake into an acknowledged order. ... From this difficult and delicate negotiatory work, the problematic areas of consensus and consent begin to emerge. In the interplay of opinions, freely given and exchanged to which the idea of consensus always makes its ritual bow, **some** *voices and opinions exhibit greater weight, resonance, defining and limiting power ... '.* [14]

The cultural and educational apparatuses like film journals are just some of the spaces where such voices exhibit their 'weight', where 'integration and cohesion' takes place within and into an 'acknowledged order'. In relation to black film practices, these spaces are part of the process of a continuing colonial tradition where dominant forms of knowledge are preserved and disseminated. Journals like *Screen* are part of the complex non-neutral 'technology' of the colonisers and part of the core, formative source of colonial knowledge which is transferred via the discourses of power to the periphery – the colonised. Hall's essay is limited to an economic and class analysis. It is necessary to look at domination and hegemony in relation to the colonial experience.

It is only recently, after young British black people took to the streets to express their frustration, that the cultural establishment with its continuing colonial underpinnings recognised British black film-making in any substantial way and provided opportunities for this sector to establish itself and expand into its various practices. The struggles however continue against the racist film institutions in all their large and small manifestations – mainstream industry, mainstream independents, the avant-gardes, the experimentalists, the workshops. The struggles go on for continuous funding, recognition and legitimacy based on our terms as black film-makers working with and for mainly black audiences. While the struggles continue on the financial and business levels, they are mirrored and paralleled on the practical and theoretical levels.

The technology of film-making has developed within the specific Euro-American context. As such it carries with it the particular history of that context. Linked to this particular technology are products, practices and theories which have developed within a world view confined to Europe, both east and west, and to North America. Historically therefore,

particular technologies carry with them the scars of conflicts, compromises and particular social solutions reached by the particular society. Therefore, technology in general, reflects the class relations of a particular society, the nature of its economic system, its patterns of conflict and conflict management [15]

and also its racist representations and attitudes.

The Euro-American history and world view has misrepresented and marginalised black people. Therefore, when black people choose film as a means of earning a living, as a channel for political action, for our particular and specific aesthetic creations, for entertainment and for pleasure, we constantly have to work with and against a technology which is not neutral. This becomes more problematic when we, through the colonial relationship and being black in Britain today, are part of the same society and its particular technology while at the same time excluded, marginalised and made part of the problems of this society. Being simultaneously excluded and included presents spatial, relational and psychological difficulties for black people conscious of this contradiction, but it helps us recognise the non-neutral technology for what it is – a 'social gene' [16] which on being transferred to another social context recreates through positions of power and hegemony the social structures of its place of origin. This process is overt when cultural/technological 'aid' packages like television hardware and software, in being transferred to Third World countries, become part of the process of neo-colonialism. The process is covert when black film-makers born and/or living and working in this country today,

[14] ibid, p 342.

[15] Susantha Goonatilake, *Aborted Discovery – Science and Creativity in the Third World*, London, Zed Books, 1984, p 121.

[16] ibid, p 120.

adopt film to articulate their relationships to and representations of the world they inhabit. It manifests itself in many forms, most of which are encompassed within the idea of 'good professional practice'. Such forms and practices are easily recognised as potential threats to black film-making, but are nevertheless consciously adopted by black film-makers to create positions of power from which the dominant is engaged. Thus 'good professional practices' are adopted and thrown back into the faces of the dominant.

In the theoretical field, however, the threats are not that easy to spot. As film technology has developed so has its theory within the particular world-view. The body of theoretical knowledge now available has assumed the position of dominance along with the other cultural apparatuses of the particular society. As stated earlier this dominance is hegemonic in its manoeuvrings as fundamental core knowledge. Within the core, major philosophical problematics are discussed and major paradigms formed, while at the periphery where the dominated/colonised reside, the theoretical work undertaken is applied, imitative, repetitive and confirmatory.[17]

Thus black film theory, exposed to the dissemination of dominant knowledge through the ideological educational and cultural apparatuses of this particular society, finds itself using the language and conceptual tools of the dominant film theoretical traditions. Within the paradigms of these traditions (which were set without our participation) and with their tools of analysis, we have debated the Imaginary and the Symbolic, discussed narrative and discourse, studied realism and the positions of the subject, discussed representation and signification, looked at the politics of pleasure, desire and sexuality, read our Brecht and Barthes, Heath and

MacCabe, Coward and Kristeva, analysed aspects of the 'look' and the 'other', linked them to the colonial 'look' and discourse and studied our relationship to and reciprocity and collusion with that 'look'. The process continues but so far it has resulted only in our knowing what we knew all along – our subjected and dominated position with special reference to colonialism.

It is true we have learned the mechanisms of that domination in detail (often through the most unnecessarily excruciating language) and are using it one way or another to challenge racism. But knowing the mechanisms and using the language appropriately only makes us participate in our own domination. We are therefore careful not to become privileged élites like the dependent intelligentsia of Third World countries moulded on Western models. In seeking legitimacy, we seek it on our own terms, not on the hegemonic terms of the dominant. When we challenge the paradigms, as in the film *Territories* (directed by Isaac Julien, 1984) [18], the guardians of these paradigms become defensive and seek to slot our work into identifiable, legitimised categories. Thus *Territories* gets compared to, say, Godard or the avant-garde and doubts are cast as to whether it was made by a black film-maker. At a recent open screening of films on black subjects [19], the white section of the audience (those familiar with and practising

17   See Susantha Goonatilake, op cit, especially pages 15 and 110.

18   Produced by Sankofa St Martins School of Art 1984.

19   Part of a series of screenings/discussions on the subject 'Power and Control', organised by Sankofa Film and Video Ltd, 1984.

Territories (directed by Isaac Julien): recruited for the dominant paradigms.

within the dominant theoretical and practical traditions) were desperate to slot black film work into *their* legitimate categories and keep the discussion within the dominant core theoretical knowledge. They wanted to know what we, the black film-makers, were all about, where we were coming from and where we were going *within their paradigms*. Ultimately, whether one likes it or not, this is a racist attitude based on an allegiance to a dominant knowledge system and an expectation that the 'colonised' should stay within the boundaries of this system.

Thus the problems for black film-makers are many and complex. If we choose to work uncritically within the dominant traditions of practice and theory we face participating in our own subordination, mis-representation and marginalisation. Working completely outside the system is naive and impossible. The very act of picking up a camera to negotiate our representations of our existence for ourselves together with our audiences is an acknowledgement and acceptance to a degree of our position *within* a total, continuing historical process specific to Western society – a process in which we, through inclusion/exclusion, played and continue to play a significant part. To work unproblematically outside film practice and theory would require total revolutionary change of the whole society and a repetition of the entire historical technical process of the discovery of photography and the moving image.

What is needed is a new theoretical practice developed with and through our audience, addressing issues specific to ourselves. This is done with an acute, immediate and constant awareness of the dominant traditions always in the foreground – traditions not easy to ignore, too dominant to dismiss. But we have at least made a start at the revolutionary process by identifying the 'existence of (their) rules, the facts of their meanings and the reality they embody'[20]. With this awareness we undo their 'rules', 'meanings' and 'realities' by making/re-making films for ourselves.

Our way to make it new is to make it again ... and making it again is enough for us and certainly 'almost us'.[21]

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[20]Lisa Cartwright, 'The Front Line and Rear Guard', *Screen* November-December 1984, vol 25 no 6, p 59.

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[21] I have paraphrased the following quotation from photographer Richard Prince, 'His way to make it new was to make it again ... and making it again was enough for him and certainly, personally speaking, "almost him".' (Cited by Abigail Solomon Godeau in 'Winning the Game When the Rules Have Been Changed: Art Photography and Postmodernism', *Screen* November-December 1984, vol 25 no 6, p 99.)

EXPEDITION
EXTRACTS FROM A TAPE-SLIDE TEXT
IN TWO PARTS
BY THE BLACK AUDIO FILM COLLECTIVE

PART I: SIGNS OF EMPIRE

An investigation into the fiction English National Character as it is specifically produced through the excess of Colonial Fantasy.

Through a series of visual/textual strategies elements of the discourses of Empire are interrupted to explore, amongst other things – their racial economy; their obsession with a 'magnum virum mater' (Mighty Mother of Man); their concern with prioritising landscapes of stereotypes.

PART II: IMAGES OF NATIONALITY

An examination of Nation, Race and the Colonial Encounter. An audio-visual engagement with the mythologies around which Presence(s) is/are secured; the conglomerate of signs which structures the narrative of National Identity.

An investigation of monumental symbolic order – the Geo-Political Indiscretion which organises contemporary subjectivities.

A poem on remembrance.

THERE;

IN THAT MONSTER MOUTH
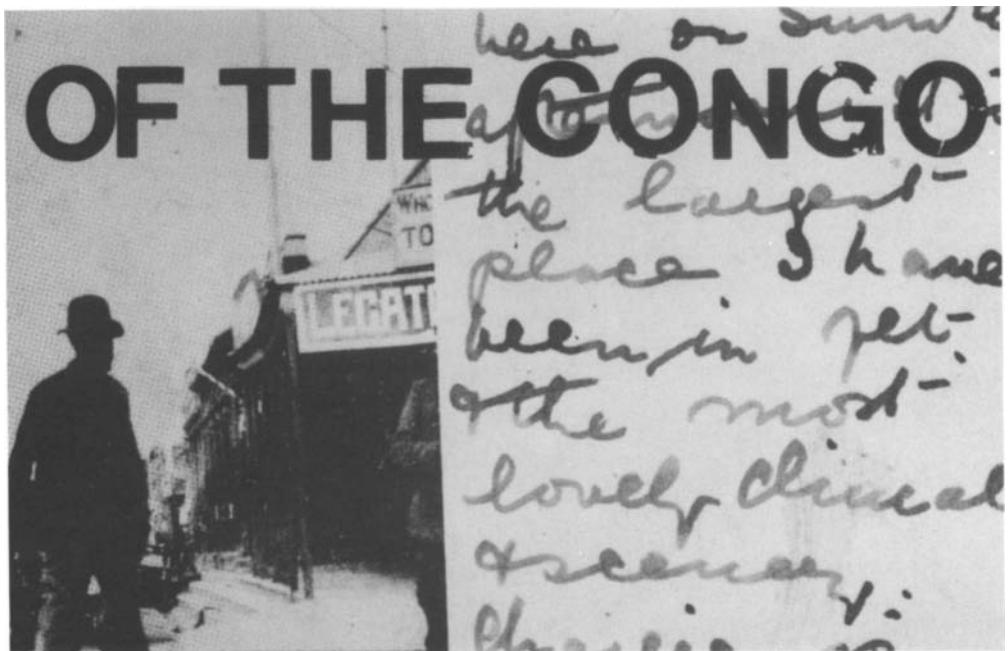
OF THE CONGO
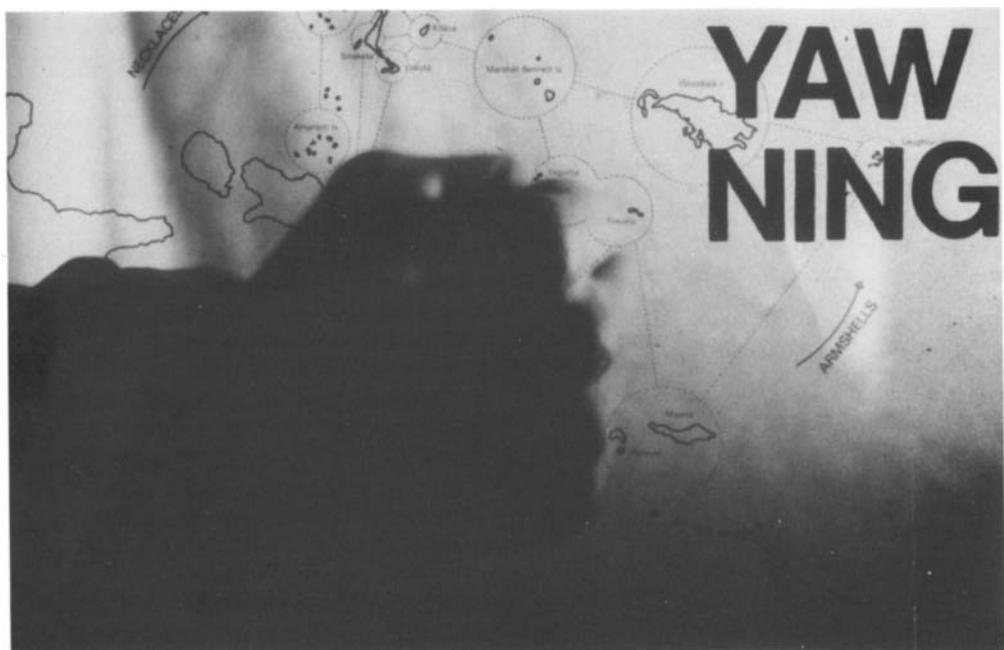
YAWNING

SEVEN MILES WIDE

VOMITING

ITS DIRTY CONTENTS
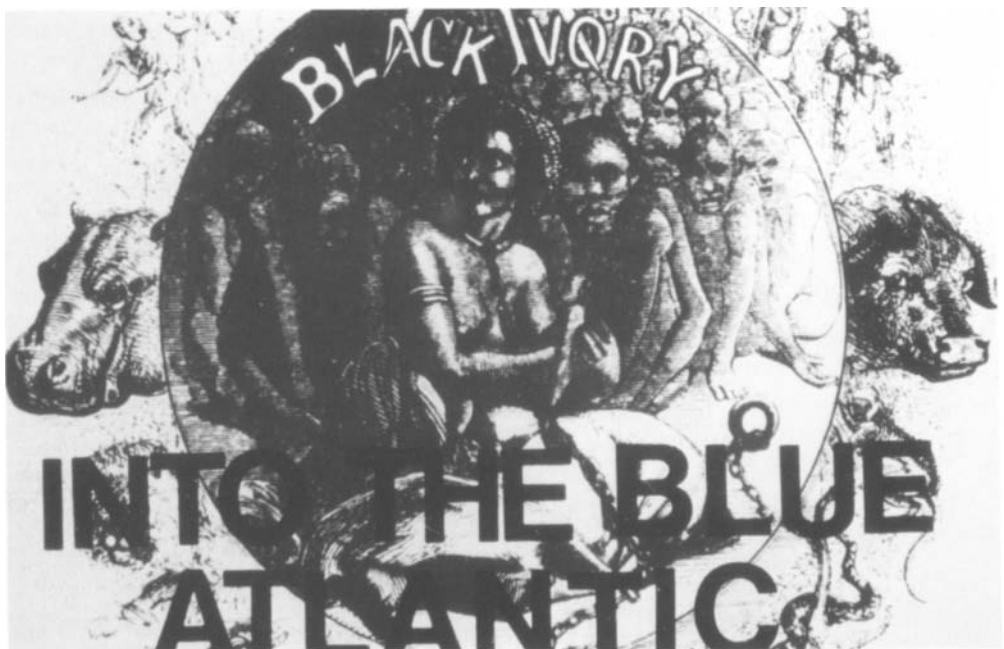

INTO THE BLUE ATLANTIC

THERE
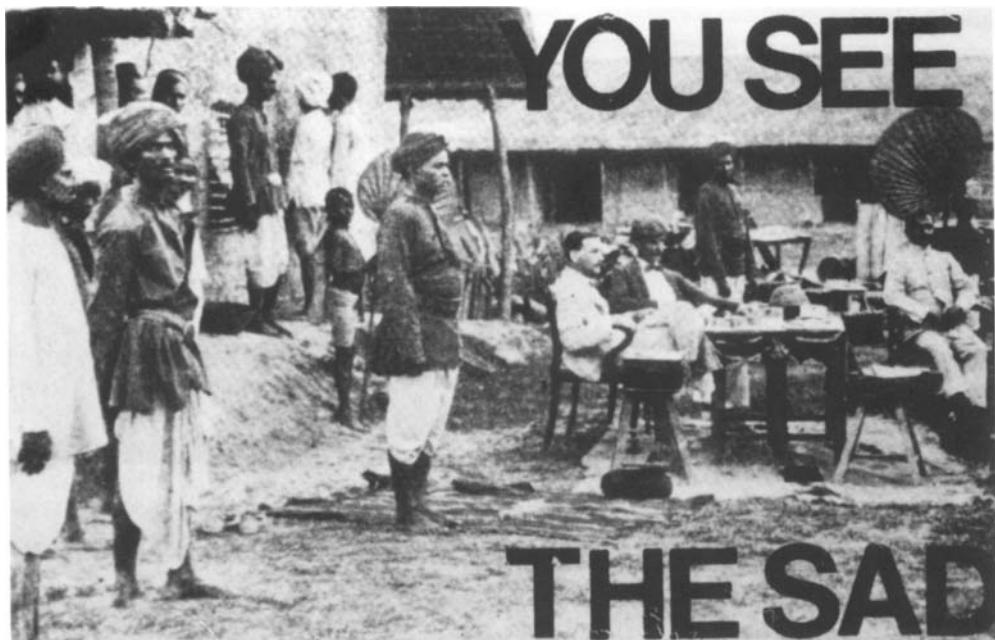
YOU SEE THE SAD
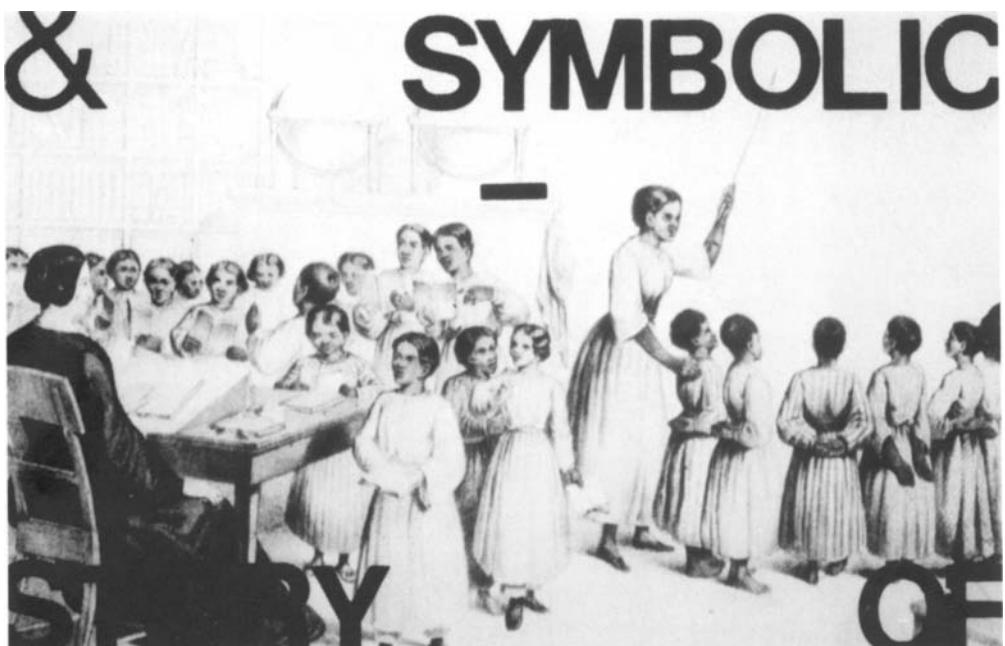
& SYMBOLIC STORY OF
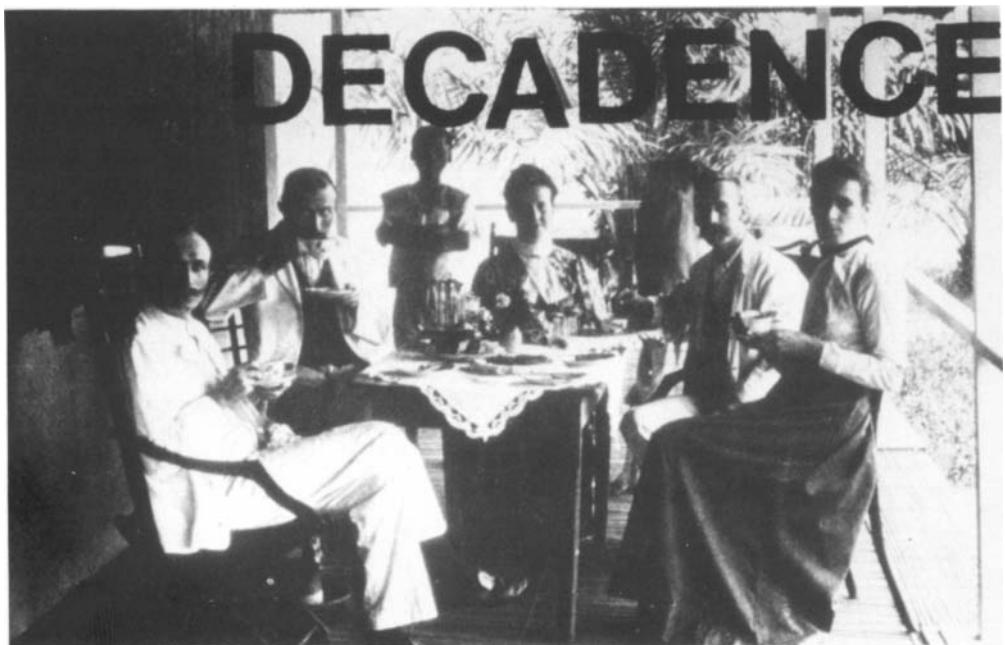
DECADENCE

ON THE WEST COAST OF

AFRICA

HYSTERIA & IMAGINARY THREATS

Expedition: Signs of Empire and Images of Nationality is available for hire from the Black
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